

## “Me”

### The Nature of Conceit

[The psychological complexes and narcissism]

by Piya Tan ©2007

“What is in our mind appears more real than what is outside of it.” [7.5]

## 1 Complexes

**1.1 STATUS AND CONCEIT. The Alagaddûpama Sutta** (M 22) teaches that the five aggregates, each and every one of them, should be regarded as ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’<sup>1</sup> These statements are the opposite of the threefold graspings (*ti, vidha gāha*), namely,

“This is mine”	( <i>etam mama</i> )	(arises through craving, <i>taṇhā, gāha</i> )	= “mine-making”;
“This I am”	( <i>eso ’ham asmi</i> )	(arises through conceit, <i>māna, gāha</i> )	= “conceit”; and
“This is my self”	( <i>eso me attā</i> )	(arises through wrong view, <i>diṭṭhi, gāha</i> )	= “I-making.”

(Anattā, lakkhaṇa Sutta, S 3:68 = SD 1.2)

These three wrong attitudes are also known as the “latent tendencies to ‘I’-making, ‘mine’-making and conceit” (*ahaṅ. kāra, mamaṅ. kāra, mānānusaya*).<sup>2</sup> These threefold graspings are the main factors behind conception (*maññana*) (M 1) and mental proliferation (*papañca*) (M 18). In short, such experiences are not merely “beliefs” but are direct reactions to reality.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, we shall discuss the second of the threefold graspings—that of “This I am” (*eso ’ham asmi*)—which arises because of grasping through conceit (*māna, gāha*). When we hold the view, “This I am,” we are clinging to the notion of **duality**, that is, there is an “I” and “other” beyond the mere conventional usage of the words. In colloquial terms, this is the “judgemental” mentality, or the “this is my personality” attitude, that is, we measure ourself against others following these three discriminations,<sup>4</sup> along with their psychological cognates:

(1) “I am better than...”	( <i>seyyo ’ham asmî ti</i> )	superiority complex;
(2) “I am equal with [the same as]...”	( <i>sadiso ’ham asmî ti</i> )	equality complex; and
(3) “I am inferior to...”	( <i>hīno ’ham asmî ti</i> )	inferiority complex.

**1.2 A JUNGIAN ANALYSIS.** Although the notion of conceit (*māna*) is a very important and ancient one in Buddhist psychology, it was only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that western psychologists began to develop any coherent theory of psychological complexes. Such notions however are well known today. We shall examine *the western notions* related to conceit first, as more people (including those who read these notes) today are more familiar with the modern notions than the Buddhist ones. Moreover, the western technical terms and concepts would thus serve as a bridge for a better understanding of how the terms on both sides of the mind traditions work.

In western psychology, a **complex** is generally an important group of unconscious associations, or a strong unconscious impulse, lying behind an individual’s personality. The theoretical details vary from system to system. However, the existence of complexes is generally agreed upon in systems based on *depth psychology*.<sup>5</sup> They are generally ways of mapping the mind or psyche, and share many important and common theoretical terms in psychotherapy.

<sup>1</sup> M 22.26 f/1:138.

<sup>2</sup> M 22.15, 72.15, 112.11 20, S 2:75, 3:236, 4:41, A 1:132, 133.

<sup>3</sup> See Bodhi, 1980b:8-11; Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind*, 1995:32 f.

<sup>4</sup> The 3 conceits are also called “the three discriminations” (*tayo vidhā*): see **Samiddhi S** (S 1.20/1:12) = SD 21.4. The 3 are listed at: **D** 33.1.10(23)/3:216; **S** 22.49/3:48 (×4), **35**.108/4:88 (×5), **45**.162.5:56, **46**.41/5:98; **A** 4.185/2:176 f (×2); **Tha** 1079; **Nm** 1:80 (×4), 107, 194, 195, 196, 244, 251, 2:350, 413, 426 (×3), 443.

<sup>5</sup> **Depth psychology** is a broad term for any psychological approach that examines the depths (the hidden or deeper parts) of human thought and experience. It is applied in psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud), where it provides a

The term “complex,” or “feeling-toned complex of ideas,” was coined by the German neurologist and psychiatrist, **Theodor Ziehen**, in 1898. It was adopted by **Carl Jung**<sup>6</sup> when he was still a close associate of Sigmund Freud. Jung described a “complex” as a “node” in *the unconscious*,<sup>7</sup> which may be imagined as a knot of unconscious feelings and beliefs, detectable only indirectly, through behavior that is puzzling or inexplicable.

Jung found evidence for complexes very early in his career, in *the word association tests* conducted at the Burghölzli, the psychiatric clinic of Zurich University, where he worked from 1900-1908. In the word association tests, a researcher read a list of words to each subject, who was asked to say, as quickly as possible, the first thing that came to mind in response to each word. Researchers timed subjects’ responses, and noted any unusual reactions (hesitations, slips of the tongue, signs of emotion). Jung was interested in patterns he detected in the subjects’ responses as they suggested unconscious feelings and beliefs.

According to Jung, the anima (Latin, meaning both “soul” and “mind”), refers to the *feminine* inner personality, as present in the unconscious of the male. It can be identified as all of the unconscious feminine psychological qualities that a male possesses. The anima is usually an aggregate of a man’s mother but may also incorporate aspects of sisters, aunts, and female teachers.<sup>8</sup> The animus, on the other hand, is the male analogue of anima, that is, a set of unconscious *masculine* qualities and potentials. The shadow<sup>9</sup> is whatever that are in our minds that are unconscious, repressed, undeveloped and denied;<sup>10</sup> in other words, we are *unconscious* of them, but they have a powerful influence on our lives, and often we are autopiloted by them.

In Jungian terms, we should become individuated individuals, that is, harmonizing with our anima (for a man) or with our animus (for a woman), coming to terms with our shadow, and so realizing our true

frame of reference for exploring underlying motives and approaching various mental disorders, with the belief that these frames of reference are intrinsically healing. It seeks to understand the deeper layers of behavioural and cognitive processes—the unconscious. Other well known theories and therapies based on depth psychology are those of Carl Jung, Alfred Adler and Otto Rank.

<sup>6</sup> **Carl Gustav Jung** (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology. His special approach to understanding the mind is through exploring the world of dreams, art, mythology, philosophy and religion. He freely reinterpreted eastern religions (incl Buddhism) to explain and support his theories. Among his notable contributions are the concepts of the psychological archetype, the collective unconscious, and his theory of synchronicity.

<sup>7</sup> For Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the **unconscious** refers to that part of mental functioning which the subjects are unaware of, and is a repository for socially unacceptable ideas, desires, traumatic memories, and painful emotions repressed by the mind. For Jung, this concept only refers to the *personal* unconscious, and he further speaks of the *collective unconscious*, ie, the deepest level of the mind (psyche), the reservoir of inherited experiences.

<sup>8</sup> In a film interview, Jung was not clear if the anima/animus archetype was totally unconscious, calling it “a little bit conscious and unconscious.” In the interview, he gave an example of a man who falls head over heels in love, then later in life regrets his blind choice as he finds that he has married his own anima—the unconscious idea of the feminine in his mind, rather than the woman herself.

<sup>9</sup> The shadow is an archetype, and is present in everyone. An **archetype** is a generic, idealized model of a person, object, or concept, from which similar instances are derived, copied, patterned, or emulated. Archetypes found in literature are generally called *stereotypes* (a personality type repeatedly observed, esp an oversimplification), but in a strict sense, an archetype is like a “father” figure or a “mother” figure. In psychology, an archetype is a model of a person, personality, or behavior.

<sup>10</sup> In Jungian psychology, **the shadow** is a part of the unconscious mind that is mysterious and often disagreeable to the conscious mind, but which is also relatively close to the conscious mind. It may partly be one’s link to animal life, which is superseded during early childhood by the conscious mind. Then it goes on to hold thoughts that are repressed by the conscious mind. According to Jung, the shadow is instinctive and irrational, but is not necessarily evil, even when it might appear to be so. It can be both ruthless in conflict and empathetic in friendship. It is important as a source of hunches, for understanding of one’s own more inexplicable actions and attitudes (and of others’ reactions), and for learning how to accept and integrate the more problematic or troubling aspects of one’s personality.

self.<sup>11</sup> We can overcome or avoid the anima/animus possession and remove projections by integrating the contrasexual archetype into our consciousness, so that we develop wholesome qualities beyond merely those symbolic of our sexes. *The individuated man* is able to tap the depths of feeling, relationship and sensitivity, while *the individuated woman* is erudite, self-reliant, emotionally independent.<sup>12</sup>

This statement of the Buddha’s recorded in **the Mahā Vaccha,gotta Sutta** (M 73) has a well known stock passage (**in bold**) containing a description of an awakened person, one might be said to be *spiritually individuated*.

(Apart from the Blessed One, the monks, the nuns, the white-clad laymen, and the white-clad laywomen, living the holy life,) Vaccha, there are not only one hundred, or two or three or four or five hundred, but far more white-clad laymen followers,... white-clad laywomen followers, my disciples, enjoying sensual pleasures, the doers of my teaching, the heeders of my advice, **crossed over doubt, gone beyond uncertainty, won fearless confidence, who, independent of others**, dwell in the Teacher’s Teaching” (as once-returners and stream-winners).

(M 73.10/1:491 f) = SD 27.4

The early sangha comprises a large number of saints who are “independent of others,” who attain spiritual liberation even “without faith in the Buddha,” because they have awakened through their own effort. It is then that wise faith arises in them towards the Buddha and the Dharma. The best known examples are **Sāriputta**,<sup>13</sup> amongst the monks, and **Citta the householder**,<sup>14</sup> amongst the laity.

## 2 Inferiority complex & inferiority conceit

**2.1 AN ADLERIAN ANALYSIS.** The three conceits or complexes have already been mentioned [1.1] as follows:

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| (1) “I am better than...”              | superiority complex;  |
| (2) “I am equal with [the same as]...” | equality complex; and |
| (3) “I am inferior to...”              | inferiority complex.  |

It is interesting to note that the Buddha and the early Buddhists speak of not just one or two complexes, but of *three* complexes, over two thousand years before any western system or modern individual ever thought of them in psychological terms.

An **inferiority complex**, according to psychology and psychoanalysis, is *a feeling, imagined or real, that one is inferior to another or others in some way*. It is often a subconscious state that the afflicted individual tends to overcompensate, resulting in either spectacular achievement or extreme antisocial behavior, or both. Unlike a normal (conscious) feeling of inferiority, which can act as an incentive for achievement, an inferiority complex is *an advanced state of discouragement*, often resulting in a retreat from difficulties and resorting to psychological defence mechanisms.<sup>15</sup>

It was **Alfred Adler** (1870-1937), an Austrian medical doctor, psychologist, and founder of the school of individual psychology who pioneered work on inferiority complex. Classical Adlerian psycho-

<sup>11</sup> **Eric Pettifor**: “An individuated individual is one in whom the unconscious and conscious are harmonized, and ego is decentralized (prerequisite and consequence). This is achieved by getting in touch with the unconscious, without allowing the ego to be overwhelmed by it. Ego has an explicit value. Functions which exist below the threshold of consciousness need to be brought above that threshold, repressed shadow contents need to be acknowledged, and the major archetypes of the collective unconscious (shadow, anima/animus, self) need to be discovered and related to, so that their influence can be consciously mediated, their concerns addressed, since they are quasi-autonomous subpersonalities in their own right. Individuation is a life long process which is never really finished, though minimum prerequisites are achievable.” (Eric Pettifor, “Becoming whole: Applied Psychoses”, in *Analytical Psychology and Zen Buddhism*. 1995): [http://pandc.ca/?cat=carl\\_jung&page=becoming\\_whole](http://pandc.ca/?cat=carl_jung&page=becoming_whole).

<sup>12</sup> See further, “Individuation” = SD 8.7 Intro (4).

<sup>13</sup> See **Pubba,kotṭhaka S** (S 48.44/5:221) = SD 10.7.

<sup>14</sup> See **Nigaṇṭha Nāta,putta S** (S 41.8/4:298-300) = SD 40.7.

<sup>15</sup> I have here consciously combined the usage of the terms of individual psychology and of psychoanalysis. See **Khaluṅka S** (A 8.14) = SD 7.9.

logy<sup>16</sup> makes a distinction between primary and secondary inferiority feelings. A primary inferiority feeling is said to be rooted in a young child’s early experience of weakness, helplessness and dependency. It is then intensified by comparisons to older siblings and adults. A secondary inferiority feeling relates to an adult’s experience of being unable to reach an unconscious, desired goal of subjective security and success to compensate for the inferiority feelings. The perceived distance from that goal leads to a negative feeling that recalls the early inferiority feeling. The combined effects of these inferiority feelings can be very powerful. As the primary feeling of inferiority leads to more secondary feelings of inferiority, a vicious cycle keeps the afflicted in a neurotic lifestyle.

**2.2 NEUROSIS.** **Neurosis**, also known as *psychoneurosis* or *neurotic disorder*, is a general term for any mental imbalance that causes distress. However, unlike a psychosis or some personality disorders, it does not prevent rational thought or the ability to function in daily life. The term was coined by the Scottish doctor **William Cullen** in 1769 to refer to “disorders of sense and motion” caused by a “general affection of the nervous system.” For Cullen, it described various nervous disorders and symptoms that could not be explained physiologically. The term was however most influentially defined by Sigmund Freud over a century later, and hence particularly associated with psychoanalysis.

The DSM-IV<sup>17</sup> has eliminated the category of “neurosis” altogether. This largely reflects a decline in the fashionability of psychoanalysis, and the progressive expurgation of psychoanalytical terminology from the DSM. The term is however still used in psychoanalytical circles. Generally, a neurotic condition is not a disease, but a symptom of a deeper underlying psychological problem. It is commonly used today to refer to an ingrained habitual tendency, rooted in unconscious conflicts, and resulting in various psychological defence mechanisms, and often with attendant or prolonged anxiety.

On a sociological and spiritual level, at least, the term **neurosis** is still meaningful. The great humanist thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, **Erich Fromm** (1900-1980), points out in his study of humanistic ethics, *Man for Himself* (1947), that **neurosis** is actually *a personal effort to seem worthwhile without doing it through God or religion*. Neurosis is a kind of personal religion, a personalized God, that gives the individual personal worth and purpose. The neurotic lives in a fantasy of worth, and a belief in personal importance. *And religion often serves a person’s fantasy of worth and purpose.*

Religion, especially a God-religion, is closely related to neurosis because such a God is associated with omnipotence (“all-power”). It makes us think in the power mode. A neurotic is unable to see his own self-worth and tries to tap an external power source (such as a God-idea or a God-like figure). The neurotic, stuck in the rut of the power mode, is haunted by the fear that he is powerless, or that he might lose the power-source he has found. The point is that the neurotic is *always* insecure, that is, as long as he externalizes his source of emotional strength. Such a mental state is openly vulnerable to being exploited by others.

**2.3 LESSONS FROM LITERATURE.** Literature (especially plays and books) are an effective and enduring way of reminding ourselves of our individual and social ills. The works of the great literary masters often point out how moral virtue and religion are used as fronts to give false impressions and manipulate others. Fiction literature is a safe way of learning such human weaknesses without our falling victims to them, and to be able to sense such falseness in ourselves and our social experiences, so that we can overcome them, and avoid them in due course.

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<sup>16</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical\\_Adlerian\\_psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Adlerian_psychology) for helpful references & for a dedicated website (Henry Stein), see <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/hstein/theoprac.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> The **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)**, a handbook for mental health professionals, published by the American Psychiatric Association, lists different categories of mental disorder and the criteria for diagnosing them. It is used worldwide by clinicians and researchers as well as insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies and policy makers, but it has attracted both controversy and criticism. The DSM has gone through 5 revisions since it was first published in 1952. The last major revision was the DSM-IV published in 1994, although a “text revision” was produced in 2000. The DSM-V is currently in consultation, planning and preparation, due for publication in approximately 2011. The mental disorders section of the **International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD)** is another commonly-used guide, and the two classifications use the same diagnostic codes.

2.3.1 THE URIAH HEEP SYNDROME. The assertion of power over others can be done in a very subtle way, by what I call “the Uriah Heep syndrome,” or “the Zen master’s neurosis” (please take this with a Zen-like pinch of salt). **Uriah Heep** is a memorable fictional character found in *David Copperfield* (1850), a novel by Charles Dickens. Uriah, the main antagonist in the later part of the book, is notable for his cloying humility, obsequiousness, and insincerity. His habit of addressing David as “Master Copperfield” is so tedious as to appear insincere. Uriah explains that his ambition and greed are rooted in his inability to express them during his childhood because his father constantly reminded him to be “humble,” so that he becomes a scheming and greedy person as an adult. Uriah works as Mr Wickfield’s clerk, and by blackmailing Mr Wickfield, he gains control over most of his life and business, and eventually makes himself a full partner in the business. He then plans to marry Agnes (Wickfield’s daughter) to gain control of the Wickfield fortune. Once his fraud and treachery are unmasked, he persists in hounding Micawber and Copperfield. He is last seen in Mr Creakle’s prison where he returns to his “humble” ways, presenting himself as a model prisoner.

Many become monastics for the wrong reasons, but even then meeting a Dharma-spirited teacher may change their lives. Otherwise, they often end up as clones of Uriah Heep. Some monastics tend to put up a very “humble” façade, even talking about how “simple” they are and so on, but all this may be an effort at promoting their own self-importance and to gain the sympathy of the audience or greater patronage in a competitive religious market.<sup>18</sup> In such discourses as **the Jaṭila Sutta** (S 3.11)<sup>19</sup> and **the Ṭhānāni Sutta** (A 4.192), the Buddha teaches us how to truly know a person’s character, that is,

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| (1) through living (or constantly associating) with them, | we know their <i>moral virtue</i> ;  |
| (2) through dealing (that is, working) with them,         | we know their <i>honesty</i> ;       |
| (3) through adversities (in times of difficulties),       | we know their <i>fortitude</i> ; and |
| (4) through discussing with them,                         | we know their <i>wisdom</i> .        |

(S 1:78 f = U 65 f; discussed in detail in A 4.192 = 2:187-190) = SD 14.12

2.3.2 TARTUFFISM. *Tartuffe* (1664, 1669) is a comedy by Molière, the French playwright and one of the greatest of western comic writers, and it is his most famous play, depicting the hypocrisy of the dominant classes of French society then. After it was first performed in 1664 in Versailles, it was almost censored by the outcry of the *dévots* (“the devout”), who were very influential in the court of Louis XIV, who eventually banned it on their account. The *dévots* claimed themselves to be very religious, but as Molière points out in *Tartuffe*, they were often religious hypocrites.

In the play, the well-off householder Orgon believes that the scheming hypocrite, Tartuffe, is a man of great religious zeal and fervor. He is interesting as a character in that he convinces Orgon not by telling lies, but by manipulating Orgon so as to have control over everyone else. By the time Tartuffe is exposed and Orgon renounces him, Tartuffe already has legal control of his finances and family, and is about to steal all of his wealth and marry his daughter—all at Orgon’s own invitation! At the eleventh hour, the king intervenes, and Tartuffe is imprisoned. The word *tartuffe* is used in contemporary French and in English to refer to a hypocrite who feigns goodness, especially religious virtue.

Just because a person, especially a religious person, appears “nice,” does not mean that he is a morally virtuous person. We must ask ourselves *why* we like that person. Is it because he is saying all the things we want and like to hear? Does he truly keep to his word, and practises what he preaches? Is he kind and helpful, as he appears to be, when you (or someone else) are in emotional difficulties? Are his answers to your questions helpful in contributing to your quality of life, or are they merely clever ripostes?

In a number of discourses, such as **the Vīmaṅsaka Sutta** (M 47), the Buddha admonishes us to check out the moral virtue of religious teachers, even that of the Buddha himself.<sup>20</sup> The teacher’s deeds, words and thoughts should be carefully attended to, even investigated, to ensure that they are *not motivat-*

<sup>18</sup> This of course does not cancel out *true humility* of monastic practitioners, or even polite self-effacement which would defuse social or emotional tension, or prevent others’ “losing face” (ie not hurting the pride of others) so that their Dharma roots (affinity for spiritual learning) is not negatively affected.

<sup>19</sup> S 3.11/1:77-79 = SD 14.11.

<sup>20</sup> M 47/1:317-320 = SD 35.6.

ed by greed, hate or delusion. A monastic must always keep a safe social distance from the laity and the opposite sex.<sup>21</sup> Apparently, some modern Chinese Mahayana monastics disallow the laity to read or discuss any Vinaya matters.<sup>22</sup> The reason for this is probably that when the laity understands what the Vinaya actually entails (such as that monks should have nothing to do with money and commerce),<sup>23</sup> the monastic business would be severely affected! Moreover, such a legalistic attitude is probably based more on the influence of Confucian ethics of loyalty and class, than of the spirit of the Dharma-Vinaya.

If we are to read through **the Mahā,vagga** (Vinaya vol 1), which contains accounts on the origins of the various Vinaya rules, we see numerous examples where such rules have been introduced on account of the laity’s proposals or complaints. A true practising monastic would have no fear about the laity knowing the Vinaya, and in fact encourage them to do so, so that they know better how to relate to the monastics, for their mutual benefits.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.3 SOME LOCAL HANG-UPS.

2.3.1 CULTURAL CRINGE. Some sociologists and anthropologists have proposed that an inferiority complex can also occur on a broader scale, affecting entire cultures. This controversial theory, known as cultural cringe, coined after the Second World War by the Melbourne writer, critic and social commentator **AA Phillips** (1900-1985), in an influential and highly controversial 1950 essay of the same name.<sup>25</sup> It explored deep-seated feelings of inferiority that local intellectuals struggled against, and which were most clearly pronounced in the Australian theatre, music, art and letters.

**Cultural cringe** is defined as *a communal inferiority complex that causes people in a country or community to dismiss their own culture as inferior to the cultures of other countries or communities*. It is closely related, although not identical, to the concept of colonial mentality,<sup>26</sup> and is often linked with the display of anti-intellectual attitudes towards thinkers, scientists, artists and writers from a colonial or post-colonial nation. It can also be manifested in individuals in the form of “cultural alienation” or “loss of culture.”

Such a psychologically inferior attitude is exemplified by this real-life encounter in Singapore: when a fan of foreign Buddhist speakers was once asked why he does not attend classes run by local teachers, he replied, “Oh, they are always available!” As such, the expression “cultural cringe” or its equivalent, is used by locals to show a strong disapproval of such inferiority complex, and to appreciate the merits of local culture and to promote local talents, so that local issues are understood, resolved and improved.<sup>27</sup>

Surely, we can learn a lot from foreign teachers and speakers, but they are at best like absent parents, but we are here to stay and have to take care of our big Buddhist family. We need to be committed to the daily chores of personal practice, fellowship, teaching and charity, so that we are *a living and present Buddhist community*. Clearly there is a very significant difference between working towards a local Buddhist identity—a living Buddhist experience—and being fans of an exotic gurus’ club. Indeed, after the foreign speaker has left for home, and all expenses donated and disbursed, we are left to clean up the hall and put back the furniture. If we do not care and work for our spiritual community, we will have none.

2.3.2 THE PINKERTON SYNDROME. The online Dictionary of Singlish and Singapore English (begun in 2004) has this interesting entry:

<sup>21</sup> See the 2 Aniyata rules (V 197-191); Thanissaro, *The Buddhist Monastic Code*, 2nd ed, 1996:157-162 (ch 6).

<sup>22</sup> In Singapore Buddhist bookshops, where Chinese Vinaya books are displayed, you might see such a sign.

<sup>23</sup> See **Money and Monastics** = SD 4.19.

<sup>24</sup> Besides Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Buddhist Monastic Code*, 1996, there is Bhikkhu Ariyesako, *The Bhikkhus’ Rules: A guide for laypeople*, Kallista, VIC: Sanghāloka Forest Hermitage, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Angel Phillips, *AA Phillips on The Cultural Cringe*. Melbourne University Publishing, Jan 2006. ISBN 0-522-85221-1.

<sup>26</sup> **Colonial mentality** refers to institutionalised or systemic feelings of inferiority within some societies or peoples who have been subjected to colonialism, relative to the mores or values of the foreign powers which had previously subjugated them. The concept essentially refers to the acceptance, by the colonised, of the culture or doctrines of the coloniser as intrinsically more worthy or superior. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial\\_mentality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_mentality). See below here.

<sup>27</sup> In this connection, see the concept of **missiology** [2.7].

**Pinkerton Syndrome** *n.* [Eng. < the character of Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin *Pinkerton* in the opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904) by Italian composer Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924)]. The tendency (perceived to be possessed by Asian Singaporeans in particular) to be favourably disposed towards, or prejudiced in favour of, Caucasians to the detriment of persons of other ethnic origin.

¶ In *Madama Butterfly*, Pinkerton, an officer of the United States Navy stationed in Japan, arranges a marriage to a Japanese geisha girl, Cio-Cio-San, known as Butterfly. He goes through a wedding ceremony with her but then returns to America, leaving the faithful Butterfly who, unknown to him, bears his son. Butterfly refuses to believe that Pinkerton has abandoned her. Three years later he returns to Japan with a new American wife. When Butterfly learns the truth she kills herself. (<http://www.singlishdictionary.com/>)

Even in the early 21st century, it is common to see double standards in how white westerners are generally given better treatment than locals in Singapore. While it may be true that some native customers may be fussy, unrefined and, worst of all, tight-fisted, the white westerner is generally perceived to be more wealthy and generous. This may well be true if we are merely a nation of shop-keepers, but there are clearly more shoppers (both religious and non-religious) in Singapore, and a significant majority of them are Buddhist.

Imagine this 1980s scenario: a local English-speaking monk had been invited by a campus Buddhist group to give a talk to the tertiary society. Then news came that a foreign monk has arrived. Due to the busy schedule of the foreign monk, the local monk’s talk was summarily cancelled in favour of the foreign speaker. It is also commonly perceived by the larger Buddhist groups that “white monks and nuns” are better crowd-pullers than local speakers, and like in the local hotels and shops, they are treated very much like pop stars.

The Straits Times of 14 December 2007 Forum page has a letter from Dr Soo Kam Kwan in support of an earlier letter by Leong Seu Weng on how a bellhop hailing a taxi for a Caucasian family behind him (ST 8 December 2007). A remark made by Soo is relevant here:

Recognition that our self-deprecating behaviour reflects our poor perception of ourselves will help us understand why we sometimes treat our own kind worse than we treat others. As Shakespeare said in *Julius Caesar*, “The fault...is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.”<sup>28</sup> (Soo Kam Kwan, Straits Times Forum, 14 Dec 2007)

2.3.3 COLONIAL MENTALITY. Both Malaysia and Singapore were last colonized by Britain<sup>29</sup> but gained independence in 1959 and 1957 respectively. **Singapore**, a secular and cosmopolitan state and vibrant global business city-state, has politically influential Christian communities especially at the higher echelons of power, partly as a colonial heritage. The historical presence and zealous evangelism of various Christian groups impact powerfully on the Buddhist psyche so that the Christians are perceived as formidable adversaries, comprising the upper classes, the better-educated, the more successful business and education professionals, and the political elite. The perceived “superiority” of the Christian groups and their activities are regularly mentioned during casual and formal meetings of Buddhists when discussing policies or planning activities, and which are often measured against those of the Christians.

A classic example is reported by a white Canadian Buddhist scholar friend who visited me. One day, on a stroll in the neighbourhood, a local Chinese boy, noticing he was white, enthusiastically approached him and declared, “I’m a Christian!” After a moment of flabbergast, my Canadian friend could only reply, “I’m a Buddhist!” Our country may be independent, but some of our minds are still colonized by the evangelists.

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<sup>28</sup> (To Brutus) *Julius Caesar* act 1, scene 2.

<sup>29</sup> The region was first colonized by the Portuguese who conquered Melaka (Malacca) in 1511; then the Dutch took over in 1641. In 1795, the British began to take over the peninsula. After Independence, Malay communal politics dominated the country, often resulting in unease with the other major communities, esp the Chinese and the Indians.

The Malaysian Buddhist situation is even more complicated since **Malaysia** has a very strong Muslim political elite. The Malaysian Buddhist is likely to be hit by a double whammy of a colonial mentality (from the country’s colonial past) and an inferiority complex the fear of offending the dominant Muslims. Understandably, there is often an urgent valuing of the patronage of politicians and the powerful as insurance for the success of a Buddhist community, centre or activity. Local Buddhists also tend to work in very closely knitted circles that tend to be dominated by a strong personality. As such, Buddhist leaders, teachers and workers have to be very mindful of not raising any kind of religious controversy.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the general tacit feeling is that while the Muslims have political clout and the Christians a sociohistorical advantage (eg with landed churches and missionary schools), the Buddhists can only *work hard and creatively* for their survival. Understandably, a feeling of inferiority, albeit tacit, often predominates in the Buddhist communities and activities, where there is a great drive to excel and connect with those deemed as sources of power, status, or excellence. Understandably, both on an individual and community level, there would be a powerful sense of fulfillment if a Buddhist is awarded any honour or heraldic title (such as Datuk or Dato). In short, in a community where *status* matters, it is expedient to regard this as a skillful means.

Even on a tertiary level, Malaysian students tend to address lecturers, especially foreign white teachers as “sir.” Although this may be the colonial inheritance of Malaysia’s education system, such an address code is common, and we are expected (as politically correct) to address a titled person by his title. Local scholars, Aida and Maimunah, reports:

This category is related to the values of respect for elders and hierarchical relationships, which make Malaysians very receptive without much questioning (Asma, 1996). On the other hand, among the westerners especially Americans, informal address indicates the value of equality. As such egalitarianism among them could encourage openness and break communication barriers. Another concept which is consistent to this challenge is the concept of power distances by Hofstede (1980)<sup>31</sup> whereby, *the higher the hierarchy, the greater the power distance*. Thus; in Malaysia, being a lecturer and foreigner pose a prevalent barrier between the expatriate and his students. (Aida Hafitah binti Mohd Tahir & Maimunah Ismail 2007:85; emphases added)

It is interesting when I, out of habit, brought this title-addressing to Singapore in late 2000, and addressed other Buddhist leaders and elders appropriately as “Doctor,” etc, but was promptly told to address everyone by their given name—which I must admit I was somewhat uncomfortable with at first. The lesson here is that we can either bring into our mindful consciousness any negative social conditioning and correct it, or we can skillfully help others outgrow such unhealthy conditionings. Otherwise, such a social conditioning will be passed down to others by a process called “**social imprinting**,”<sup>32</sup> or, more specifically, *negative social imprinting*.

**2.4 COLONIAL MENTALITY AND CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM.** Social perception, like gossip, is often mass delusion, but unfortunately, it tends to strongly influence how we think and act, especially in times of crisis. A common perception, more common in Singapore than in Malaysia, is that being a Christian is

<sup>30</sup> As the Japanese saying goes, “the nail that sticks out gets hammered down.”

<sup>31</sup> See **Teacher or Teaching** = SD 3.14(8).

<sup>32</sup> “**Imprinting**,” esp filial imprinting, in which a young animal learns the characteristics of its parent, is clearly seen in nidifugous birds (that leave their nests shortly after birth), that imprint on their parents and then follow them around. This was first reported in domestic chickens, by the 19th century amateur biologist **Douglas Spalding**. It was rediscovered by the early ethologist **Oskar Heinroth**, and studied extensively and popularised by his disciple **Konrad Lorenz** working with greylag geese. Filial imprinting is also noticed in child development, where it refers to the process by which a baby learns who its mother and father are. The process is recognised as beginning in the womb, when the unborn baby starts to recognise its parents’ voices. If there is an increased level of stress at the time of the original imprinting, this learning is more robust than normal. In animals, imprinting is irreversible, as it is never forgotten. However, in human beings, mindful awareness and initial acceptance of such a state is the beginning of freeing ourselves from its hold. For refs, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imprinting\\_\(psychology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imprinting_(psychology)); also <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9110417/animal-behaviour>.



“high class,” that is, they are perceived as being influential, often found in the higher echelons of power, and populate the more successful sectors of the economy.

The Singapore government is well aware of the negative effects that evangelism and religious fanaticism can have on the public (such as breaking up families, causing social strife, and committing mass violence), and, as such, places a high premium on religious harmony,<sup>33</sup> and in 2007 passed tough laws to curtail evangelism and religious intolerance.<sup>34</sup> Despite this, we still often met with neatly-dressed young Mormon evangelists in public places.

Over a period of a just few months, I had the misfortune of encountering them at least three times during my frequent shuttling about in Singapore. The first time was at a bus-stop in Pasir Panjang, another time was in a East-West train, and the third time in a busy bus on Bukit Timah Road. I noticed that they always worked in pairs, neatly-dressed and wearing a name-tag.

If I stood near one of them, or if I were sitting, one of them would sit beside me, and start a friendly chat (Where are you going? The weather is a bit hot, isn't it? etc). I also noticed how they would chat with other, usually English-educated, locals, and after a while would either give the obliging listeners their card or take down their addresses (obviously to visit them for further evangelizing).

Having been approached by such evangelists numerous times for some three decades, and as a practising Buddhist, I immediately recognised them and told them I am not interested to chat. The reason is simply that it would always be a dead-end “sinful” talk which would benefit neither side.

On two occasions, however, the evangelists were somewhat overzealous. After I said, NO, he continued to prod: “You must be a Buddhist...” Only after repeatedly telling him, to my great embarrassment, that I do not wish to carry on the conversation, only then did he stop. However, on another occasion, the evangelist, started with a Hello, but when I said that I'm not interested in chatting at all, he curtly remarked, “You must be deeply hurt inside!” Thanks to my Buddhist training I simply remained totally silent, and when the train reached my destination, I alighted with a great sense of relief.

On the third occasion, which was a Deepavali public holiday, I was standing in a crowded bus filled with mostly with holidaying Indians. And there were two of these evangelists. The one opposite me said hello, and at once I said, “Sorry no talk!” Then he retorted, “Why not?” OK that’s it, I thought, and replied: “Because you are an evangelist! And I do not want to listen to any of your sinful talk!”

In fact, his rudeness spurred me on to address to the other Indians in the bus: “Do not talk to this man: he wants to convert you into a Christian!” “Why can’t I talk to them: they are my friends!” he defended. Then I turned to the Indian facing him and asked, “Are you his friend?” the Indian simply smiled with a polite no. For a while I was standing there in the crowded bus, the two evangelists were thankfully silent.

Then, when I had to move farther away into the back of the bus, I could hear one of them starting to chat with another person, but he was greeted with silence. However, I do somewhat wonder about those others who obligingly talk with such strangers, or are submissive to them, not knowing what will transpire. Maybe they feel euphoric on being addressed politely by a well-dressed white man, which sadly would reflect a colonial mentality and inferiority complex on the former.

My suspicions of their aggressive evangelical behaviour and uncivil approach were confirmed when I googled and discovered that they are doing this not only in Singapore, but in many countries. I googled an “ex-Mormon” chat-room<sup>35</sup> which discusses, amongst other things, various tricks they use to evangelize others. In fact, if they are foreigners and preaching public in this way, they would be contravening their Singapore visa permits.

My advice: If you are approached by these evangelists (or any evangelist): simply say no, **Say NO to the evangelists!**<sup>36</sup> and just walk away. However, this should in no way negatively affect our natural and local friendliness, and our respect for other's religion, but especially respect for our own. If you are continually troubled by them, notify the authorities.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.mcys.gov.sg/MCDSFiles/Press/Articles/press-release-9Jun-final.html>.

<sup>34</sup> See Singapore’s Penal Code, Section 298 & 298A (for refs, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal\\_Code\\_%28Singapore%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_Code_%28Singapore%29)) and Malaysia’s Penal Code, Section 298A, Act 574.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.exmormon.org/mormon/mormon404.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> On a polemical response to the evangelists, see <http://pali.house.googlepages.com/SayNoToEvangelists.pdf>.

**2.5 THE SLAVISH MENTALITY.** A type of colonial mentality that is socially and psychologically very debilitating and pathological is that of the **slavish mentality**, that is, the tendency to be moved by mere externality and the power mode. The most common expression of a slavish mentality is the reliance on physical objects (images, relics, etc) or rituals to give merely symptomatic relief of deep-rooted problems. Then, there is the tendency to show unquestioning devotion towards an admired personality by exhibiting cultish behaviour of believing that the person is perfect, even awakened, in some way, so that he is never wrong and does not merit any criticism. There is always the danger of *psychological transference* here (that is, we see in such personality those qualities we deem as desirable, or *groupie phenomenon*,<sup>37</sup> where we fantasize that certain special or desirable attention as being directed to us by that personality and we reciprocate accordingly. Slavish mentality is especially common in a religious system that is centred on rituals, religious status, lineages, royalty, priestcraft, magic, and religious materialism.

In such a system, where the locus of control of totally *externalized*, we generally have the fear that we may face dire consequences if we do not carefully stick to the rituals, prayers, or instructions, and that we lack the “expertise” of the masters, and as such should give them our unquestioning faith or at least the benefit of the doubt. There is the hope or perception that such “masters” (or *virtuosi*, as the sociologists call them) could solve, or have solved, our nagging problems, or have provided us with a meaning and purpose in life, or that they possess some kind of supernatural power. In short, this is idol worship<sup>38</sup> and religious superstition.<sup>39</sup>

**2.6 THE CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM.** To compound the problem, especially in Singapore, the non-Chinese-speaking local Buddhists, as a rule, are heavily dependent on or look up to foreign missionaries and teachers.<sup>40</sup> As such, there is still to date no viable local vocation or ministry. This religious dependence can perhaps be explained historically. **Dan Lusthaus** in his 1998 entry on “Buddhist philosophy, Chinese.” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*<sup>41</sup> divides the development of Chinese Buddhism roughly into four periods:

- (1) Early introduction of Indian and Central Asian Buddhism (1st-4th centuries);
- (2) Formative development of Chinese versions of Indian and Central Asian Schools (5th-7th centuries);
- (3) The emergence of distinctively Sinitic Buddhist schools (7th-12th centuries); and
- (4) The continuance of Chinese Buddhism into the present day (13th century on).

In fact, throughout East Asia (China, Korea and Japan),<sup>42</sup> we see this fourfold phase of general Buddhist development, that is, (1) the adoptive, (2) the formative, (3) the developmental and (4) the formalistic periods. During *the adoptive period*, the “foreign” Buddhism is generally followed wholesale since it is a novel system. During *the formative period*, the Buddhist elite answer local challenges and try to present Buddhism as a viable system. *The developmental period* is when the imported Buddhism begins to assume more local expressions, especially by way of local translations of the canon and texts, and the beginnings of local vocations. And *the formalistic period* is when that Buddhism has been fully adapted to the local culture, even to the extent of being distinct from early Indian Buddhism.

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<sup>37</sup> “Groupie” originally refers to a person, esp a young woman who follows pop musicians around and tries to meet them or be close to them.

<sup>38</sup> See **Idols and idolatry** = SD 36.8.

<sup>39</sup> See **Superstition** = SD 36.7.

<sup>40</sup> There are Thai, Sinhalese, Myanmar, Tibetan and Japanese temples in Singapore, but no “Singaporean” Buddhist centres like those of the convert Buddhists in the west or in Australia.

<sup>41</sup> “Buddhist philosophy, Chinese.” In E Craig (ed) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/G002SECT1> etc. Rev ed, nd, from <http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~ac-muller/yogacara/articles/chbud-big5.htm>. See esp Piya Tan, “Buddhism in China,” 2004 & “Buddhism in Japan,” 2004: <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

<sup>42</sup> “Buddhist philosophy, Chinese.” In E Craig (ed) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/G002SECT1> etc. Rev ed, nd, from <http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~ac-muller/yogacara/articles/chbud-big5.htm>. See esp Piya Tan, “Buddhism in China,” 2004 & “Buddhism in Japan,” 2004: <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

Of course, this fourfold period model is a dynamic one, with rich local variations. Pre-modern Buddhism outside of India was mostly founded on Mahāyāna and later texts, compounded by the tendency of local genius to produce their own local “Buddhist” works and systems, and even redefining the Buddha and awakening.

In our own times, the early texts, especially the Pali Canon, fragments of similar early texts (in Sanskrit, Gāndhārī, Central Asian dialects, etc), and of course the early texts (Āgama) recorded in the East Asian canons, provide us with better means of understanding what “original” Buddhism is, or at least, of making useful comparative studies of the early teachings and practise them with greater confidence of attaining the goal that the Buddha himself has attained.

**2.7 BUDDHIST MISSIOLOGY.** An understanding and acceptance of the early teachings (especially those preserved in the Suttas) gives us a “direct experience,” as it were, of the Buddha Dharma and of true reality. Growing confidence in the early teachings will inspire healthy local Buddhist vocations (monastic practitioners and teachers) and local full-time lay ministries. Currently, the various Buddhist leaders and teachers work with and within *very fragmented and atomized groups*, each with their own parochial activities and professional jealousies. To heal the situation, we need some kind of national fellowship or platform for spiritual friendship,<sup>43</sup> that is to say, they provide us with the tools for an effective **Buddhist missiology**. In other words, like charity, and in a charitable spirit, Buddhist mission should begin at home, in our own community and country.

Cultural cringe, colonial mentality, and negative social imprinting are generally irreversible, especially when we would not admit being afflicted by them, usually on account of the defence mechanism of *rationalization*.<sup>44</sup> However, these complexes begin to diminish down through the generations, as we are more open to them, discuss more about them, and work towards a wholesome vision of Buddhist work. We need a *disciplined, inspired and insightful missiology*. The essence of Buddhist missiology is found in **the Great Commission** (V 1:21), where the Buddha sends out the first 60 monks to peacefully declare the Dharma to the world.<sup>45</sup> The correcting of these psychosociological aberrations are also expedited by our deepening experience of the Buddha’s living message in the Suttas: we need to *learn* the Dharma, *live* the Dharma, and *spread* the Dharma—**know the Dharma, make Dharma known**.

It is important to understand that a “local Buddhist identity” is *not* a political ideal, but a *spiritual means* of an unconditional fellowship of practising Buddhists who, by living exemplary lives of Dharma-inspired spirituality inspire others towards a more committed Buddhist living. An important characteristic of such a local Buddhist identity is that of *emotional independence* of others, whether as individuals or as a community, so that our various talents and helpful cultural traits work as the basis of a healthy Buddhist community. Such a community will show a penchant for selfless open-heartedness, for freedom from superstition, and for wise faith in the Dharma and the universal good.<sup>46</sup> In other words, the community of such individuals begins to work at overcoming narcissism [4], neurotic and compulsive habits; and to work at individuating themselves, that is, at becoming *emotionally independent but interconnected beings*.<sup>47</sup>

A caveat is in order here: a “**national Buddhist identity**” is *not* about being unique, or being different, or being better than others. It is about turning away from worldly distractions and tapping into our true spiritual potentials as members of the same community. In fact, a national Buddhist identity begins

<sup>43</sup> Efforts towards a more “Malaysian” Buddhism can, however, be found in the Sasanarakkha Sanctuary (a forest monastery outside Taiping), the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia, and the Buddhist Gem Fellowship. In Singapore, at this point, I can only think of the Buddhist Fellowship (Pasir Panjang) and the Poh Meng Tse (Dunearn Rd), that are making sustained efforts towards a more “Singaporean” Buddhism.

<sup>44</sup> On unconscious defence mechanism, see **Khaluṅka S** (A 8.14) = SD 7.9.

<sup>45</sup> See **The Great Commission** = SD 11.3.

<sup>46</sup> On a deeper level, these 3 qualities are of course those of the stream-winner: giving up self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), breaking the fetters of the attachment to mere rules and rituals (*sīla-b, bata parāmāsa*), and overcoming doubt (*vicikicchā*): see **Entering the stream** = SD 3.3.

<sup>47</sup> See further “The karma of Buddhist identity” = SD 39.1(8.4).

with a wholesome self-love that is the basis of the love for one’s family, community and country.<sup>48</sup> Only when we truly love ourselves in this manner can we love the world so as to benefit it. It is like a monastic renouncing his or her ties to a *biological* family to join a broader *spiritual* family. As such, it is not an abandoning of our family, but breaking to limits of family to unconditionally embrace all beings. It is like standing with our feet firmly planted on the ground and spreading our arms wide into the spaciousness of the heavens. It is the common propensity for joy in the Dharma, a feeling and spirituality that are shared by the community as a whole.

### 3 Superiority complex & superiority conceit

#### **3.1 DEFINITION.**

**3.1.1 Complexes and social behaviour.** Superiority complex, or the conceit that “I am better than others,” is just as incapacitating as inferiority complex. We are blinkered by the self-centred notion that there is nothing to learn *about* others or *from* others, indeed, that there is nothing more to learn, that we know about everything. **Superiority complex** is rooted in the unconscious sense of lack or powerlessness in relation to others or it could be brought upon us by others (such as a demanding parent or severe sibling rivalry).

The term *superiority complex*, as coined by Alfred Adler [2.1], refers to an unconscious neurotic mechanism of compensation formed by the individual afflicted by feelings of inferiority. Those having a superiority complex commonly *project* their feelings onto others they perceive as being inferior to themselves. Others would often speak of such superior-complexed individuals as being arrogant or cocky.

A person’s superior complex may cause him to have an exaggeratedly positive view of his worth and abilities, unrealistically high expectations for himself or of others, to dress extravagantly (with the aim of drawing attention to himself), to behave in a sentimentally affected or snobbish manner, to habitually discredit or belittle others, to be forceful with others, especially dominating those considered as weaker or less important, and so on. In simple terms, a superiority complex tends to make us behave in a habitually self-centredly vain, proud, and affected manner.

Social aloofness, daydreaming, or self-alienation could also be associated with a superiority complex, motivated by a fear of failure related or rooted in feelings of inadequacy to face the real world. As such, superiority and inferiority complexes are often found together as different aspects of the same pathology.

**3.1.2 Daṇḍa, pāṇī. The Madhu, piṇḍika Sutta** (M 18) gives a graphic description of a person with superiority complex. The Sutta opens on a dark note with the Buddha’s meeting with Daṇḍa, pāṇī,<sup>49</sup> whose name means “stick-in-hand”:

Then Daṇḍapāṇī the Sakya went up to the Blessed One and exchanged greetings with him.

When this courteous and amiable exchange was concluded, he stood at one side and leaned on his stick. Leaning thus on his stick, he asked the Blessed One:

“What does the recluse say; what does the recluse teach?”

**4** <sup>50</sup>“Friends, I say and teach in such a way so as not to quarrel with anyone in this world, with its gods, its Māras, and its Brahmās, this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its rulers and people; and in such a way that perceptions no more lie latent in that brahmin who abides

<sup>48</sup> I am inspired here by the image of the Buddha’s standing in meditation gazing at the Bodhi tree, out of gratitude for have sheltered him during his struggle for awakening. The Buddha remembers the well from where he drank. See **Dhamma & Abhidhamma** = SD 26.1(5).

<sup>49</sup> A Sakya of Kapila, vatthu, son of Añjana and Yasodharā. His brother was Suppabuddha, and his sisters Māyā and Pajāpatī. On other words, he was the Buddha’s maternal uncle. (Mahv 2.19). The Tibetan sources say that Sidhattha’s wife was Daṇḍapāṇī’s daughter (Rockhill 1884:20).

<sup>50</sup> The first part of the Buddha’s reply here clearly reflects Daṇḍapāṇī’s aggressive attitude. Comy alludes to **Puppha S** (S 22.94) where the Buddha declares, “Monk, I do not quarrel with the world; rather it is the world that quarrels with me. A Dharma speaker does not quarrel with the world.” (S 22.94/3:138): see Ñāṇananda 2005:266. In the second part of the Buddha’s reply, the word *brahmin* is used as a self-reference, while the use of the verb *anusenti* (lie latent) refers to the latent tendencies (*anusaya*), elaborated in §8. The arhat has overcome his latent tendencies.

detached from sensual pleasures, free from doubt, having cut off worry, free from craving for any kind of existence.”

5 When this was said, Daṇḍapāṇī shook his head,<sup>51</sup> wagged his tongue, and raised his eyebrows until there were three furrows in his brow,<sup>52</sup> and then leaning on his stick, left.

(M 18.3-5/1:108 f) = SD 6.14

The Majjhima Commentary explains that Daṇḍapāṇī would walk around ostentatiously with a golden stick even during the first phase of his life, while still young and healthy. When Devadatta, the Buddha’s cousin, attempted to create a schism, Daṇḍapāṇī sided with Devadatta (MA 2:73). It is also possible that his nick-name suggests that he is one who believes in power and violence.<sup>53</sup> Daṇḍapāṇī’s posture (leaning on his stick, speaking standing to the seated Buddha) is discourteous and the tone of his question is arrogantly provocative [§3]. The Buddha’s answer clearly hints at this [§4].<sup>54</sup>

**3.2 TYPES OF SUPERIORITY COMPLEX.** My purpose here is not give a detailed study of psychological complexes, but of how religion (especially Buddhism), that is, we as a religious community, may fall into such ruts when faced with difficulties and challenges. This is an open self-examination and study of what we can learn from other similar situations. The point is that *every religion has its shadow*: religion can be a fertile ground for various fantasies and aberrations, especially through conscious or unconscious self-aggrandizings or ego trips. Such self-aggrandizing complexes can occur in an individual, or as a group, or even as a whole community. When this self-aggrandizement succeeds on a massive scale, the destruction and sufferings are equally massive. Global terrorism and suicide bombing in the name of religion during the first decade of the 21st century are perfect examples of the darkest of religious shadows.

Two kinds of superiority complex are of special interest here, namely, *the God complex* and *the messiah complex*. Interestingly, both terms are related to the Abrahamic religions, where the best and most common examples of these complexes can be found. However, I wish to present a *psychological survey* here, and not a historical study.

**3.2.1 God complex.** God complex is a colloquial term that sometimes refers to a real or perceived character flaw that is a psychological complex. In simple terms, if a person fancies *himself* as championing a God-given or Buddha-given task, it is a psychological complex, but if he is *perceived* and accepted by others to be so (which is actually more common), it is more likely to be a case of **charisma**. The general effect and psychological dynamics are, however, basically the same in either case. Both cases invariably are *religious cults*.<sup>55</sup>

A person is said to have a God complex when he acts in such an arrogant and totalitarian, but super-sweet and narcissistic manner [4], so as to openly or tacitly invite total loyalty and devotion. Invariably, an elite group forms the inner circle around the God-like guru who sees himself as the saviour of the community or the world. A common characteristic of groups centred around a God-guru is that they either

<sup>51</sup> When the naked ascetic Upaka first meets the Buddha and hears his proclamation, Upaka similarly “shaking his head, took a byway and left” (V 1:7; M 26.25/1:171). This body language clearly reflects bewilderment or disbelief.

<sup>52</sup> In **the Sambhula S** (S 4.21/1:118), this demenour describes Māra the evil one in disguise to confound the monks.

<sup>53</sup> *Daṇḍa* has two main senses: (1) stick, rod (V 3:132, 196; S 1:176; A 1:138, 206; Sn 688); (2) punishment (V 1:247, 2:290; D 2:154 *brahma,daṇḍa*; M 1:86=Nc 199; S 4:62; J 4:382, 5:442); (3) a stick used as a weapon (V 1:349; D 1:4, 63; M 1:287; A 1:211, 2:208, 4:249, 5:204; S 4:117; Dh 406=Sn 630; Sn 35, 394, 629, 935); (4) violence (as a means of causing fear) (M 1:372; Nc 293, cf Sn 35). On Bodhi’s comments, see M:ÑB 1204 n229 & S:B 1409 n71.

<sup>54</sup> The Humhūṃka brahmin is sometimes said to have, in his arrogance, slighted the Buddha. There is no textual evidence for this at all. In fact, both **the Vinaya** (V 1:2) and **Nigrodha S** (U 1.4) say that he is the first human to meet the newly-awakened Buddha during the 1st Week, and received a brief teaching. Comys however put this event in the 5th Week. See SD 26.1(5).

<sup>55</sup> In general terms, a religious cult usually has the following characteristics: (1) authoritarian leadership; (2) teachings are leader-centred, not scripture-based; (3) communal and totalitarian organization; (3) aggressive proselytizing; and (4) systematic indoctrination.

die out with the guru, or they will try to fit into the mainstream by revising their teachings and methods to appear more acceptable and respectable to society at large.<sup>56</sup>

The term God-complex can also be meaningful applied to a *group*, especially a theocentric religion, where there is little or no tolerance of difference and dissent. Such intolerance is fuelled by the notion of *duality* (“if you are not with us, you are against us!”). The other side, that is, the unbeliever, non-believer, or the adversary, is regarded as “radically” evil, and as such is to be weeded out.<sup>57</sup> Reflecting on the roots and nature of suicide bombings, religious terrorism, and geopolitics of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, **David Loy** presents this thesis:<sup>58</sup>

one of the main causes of evil in this world has been human attempts to eradicate evil, or what has been viewed as evil. In more Buddhist terms, much of the world’s suffering has been a result of our way of thinking about good and evil. (Loy 2003:124)

**3.2.2 Messiah complex.** Mental health is necessary for a productive and happy life. Wrong religious teachings and unhealthy ways of teaching religion, especially when introduced at an early age, often cause mental anguish and complexes in such individuals so that they often grow into emotionally unhealthy persons and who bring negative effects on society.<sup>59</sup>

One of the most powerful religious ideas is that of *sin*, of human weakness before an all-powerful Creator-God. The notion of sin is like a sharp cleaver that divides the believer (sinning but saved) and the unbeliever (the born and perpetual sinners). There are at least two problematic aspects with this theocentric notion of sin: the concept concerns only *humans* and omits all other beings, especially animals (in which case, Buddhism, for its all-inclusive worldview, would be said to be *biocentric* or life-centred), and that the world is generally evil and is but a preparation for the heavenly life. As such, there is an urgent task for the believer to go out to proclaim the Gospel and save the world. Such a notion is often rooted in the “messiah complex.”<sup>60</sup>

**The messiah or messianic complex** is a deluded belief that one *is* or is *destined* to become the messiah (“anointed of God”) or saviour of others, be it a particular family, community, or religion, or even the world. One with a messianic complex tends to make claims of one’s own status or glory, or claiming a self-awareness of one’s own gift and how it can affect the group. In extreme cases, those with messianic complexes may see themselves as gifted with transcendent powers and who are destined to save the world. The messiah complex often goes with a God-delusion, that one is somehow communicating with God.

Even when the messiah complex affects one on a simple level, the effects are devastating. On 20 June, 2001, **Andrea Pia Yates** (née Kennedy) of Houston, Texas, USA, murdered all her five children—Noah, 7, John, 5, Paul, 3, Luke, 2, and Mary, 6 months—because she thought that Satan had possessed her and was soon going to possess her children. Yates drowned them one by one in a bath-tub in her

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<sup>56</sup> A good example here is the Western Buddhist Order founded by Sangharakshita. In an article, “The dark side of enlightenment,” in *The Guardian* (27 Oct 1997), Madeleine Bunting writes about “the cases of three vulnerable young men... which detail sexual manipulation and oppressive authoritarian cult behaviour which, in the case of one man, has been cited as a significant factor leading to his suicide.” Since then 72-year-old Sangharakshita has gone into denial and countryside retirement. The group, or what’s left of it, has also dramatically changed its exclusivist approach and now mixes more with mainstream Buddhism. See <http://www.fwbo-files.com/>.

<sup>57</sup> On radical evil, see **Beyond Good and Evil** = SD 18.7(4.1).

<sup>58</sup> See **Beyond Good and Evil** = SD 18.7(4.1).

<sup>59</sup> On the nature of group karma, see SD 39.1, esp (7.4), (8.3).

<sup>60</sup> Chinese converts to Christianity often enough have to struggle with psychological and cultural conflicts. In an early paper, Archie LEE Chi-chung (a Christian theology professor at Chinese University of HK) wrote of his concerns over the early Western missionaries: “They set upon themselves the ‘holy’ task of destroying everything that was Chinese” (1989), and later writes on the problems that some theologians and Christians have with Chinese symbols such as the dragon (1995). On a darker note, CHUANG Tsu-kung (a Taiwanese Christian theologian) writes on the “problem” of planting the conception of sin into Chinese minds because the language does *not* have a suitable word for it!

house. In her twisted Bible-filled mind, she thought that if she murdered her children before “the age of accountability,” they would all go to heaven. She thought she would be executed for the murders, and that Satan would die with her.<sup>61</sup>

Mental illness ran in Yates family, and the road to disaster began with her meeting Michael Woroniecki, a fiery travelling evangelist, from whom Andrea’s husband, Rusty Yates purchased their bus and whose religious views had influenced both Rusty and Andrea. Woroniecki emphatically warned disciples in a video he distributed in 1996 that *to call themselves Christians and not take up his itinerant lifestyle would earn them the severest judgment from God and ultimately result in irreparable spiritual damage to their children*. Rusty only agreed with some of Woroniecki’s ideas but Andrea embraced his extremist views. Woroniecki preached that “the role of women is derived from the sin of Eve and that bad mothers who are going to hell create bad children who will go to hell.”

Often religious stories with their symbolic meanings are taken literally or misinterpreted, leading to bizarre and tragic results. In a similar case that evokes the Bible story of God instructing Abraham to kill his son, Isaac, **Deanna Laney**, on 11 May 2003, murdered two of her little sons by stoning them to death, and severely handicapped her third young son. Deeply religious Laney had a series of delusions on the day of the killings. She claimed that she saw Aaron with a spear, then throwing a rock, then squeezing a frog, and believed that God was suggesting she should either stab, stone or strangle her children.

Laney killed her own children because she thought that God wanted her to do it to “prove her complete and unconditional faith in Him.” Laney told her psychiatrist, Park Dietz, that she believed that she and Andrea Yates (see above), another Texas woman who killed her children, were chosen by God to bear witness to the imminent end of the world. Deluded by the idea that she would soon bear the son of God, she likened herself to the Virgin Mary.<sup>62</sup>

The Old Testament story of the “near-sacrifice of Isaac,” known in Judaism as “The Binding of Isaac” (*Akeidat Yitzhak* or the *Akeidah*), in reality, serves to illustrate the true significance and need of animal sacrifices as supplanting the abomination of human sacrifices.<sup>63</sup> When such stories or myths are taken literally or in a wrong way, both the perpetrator and the religion suffer unhealthy consequences. Sadly, such problems will continue as long people believe in a God idea, and this almost always leads to a God-delusion.

**3.2.3 The Cathar genocide.** The history of the world religions is that of how light very often becomes hidden by the darkness of ignorance, exploitation, violence and oppression as a result of differences in belief. Often in trying to spread the light, many shadows, long and dark, are cast in the name of the most sacred in those religions and for all the wrong reasons. The greater the power and dominance a religion commands, the greater harm and destruction it always has brought, and always will bring, upon society and upon the individual’s mental health. The reason is simple: religion invariably boils down to a very *personal* way of viewing reality. When such a system of belief attracts like-minded believers, it grows into an exclusive or closed group that destroys or dispels the unlike.

One of the darkest chapters of Christian history, indeed world history, is that of **the massacre of the Cathars**. The Cathars or Catharis were members of a religious sect with gnostic<sup>64</sup> elements that appeared

<sup>61</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea\\_Yates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_Yates) & <http://crime.about.com/od/current/p/andreayates.htm>.

<sup>62</sup> See [http://www.courttv.com/trials/laney/033104\\_ctv.html](http://www.courttv.com/trials/laney/033104_ctv.html).

<sup>63</sup> The Jewish scholar, Maimonides, writes that God’s decision to allow sacrifices was a concession to human limitations. It would have been impossible for the Israelites to leap from pagan worship to prayer and meditation in one step. In his *Guide to the Perplexed* he writes, “But the custom which was in those days general among men, and the general mode of worship in which the Israelites were brought up consisted in sacrificing animals... It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan of God... that God did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service. For to obey such a commandment would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to that to which he is used; it would in those days have made the same impression as a prophet would make at present [the 12th Century] if he called us to the service of God and told us in His name, that we should not pray to God nor fast, nor seek His help in time of trouble; that we should serve Him in thought, and not by any action.” (Bk 3, ch 32; tr M Friedlander, 1904, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Dover Publications, 1956 ed.)

<sup>64</sup> **Gnosticism** (from Greek *gnosis*, knowledge; cf Skt *jñāna*) refer to doctrines that in many ways resemble those of the Bogomils, the earlier Paulicians, the Manicheans, and the Christian Gnostics of the first few centuries

in the Languedoc region of France in the 11th century and flourished in the 12th and 13th centuries. At first, persuasive means were used to convert the Cathars. Dominic Guzman, the founder of the Dominican Order, met and debated the Cathars in 1203 during his mission to the Languedoc. He concluded that only preachers who displayed real sanctity, humility and asceticism could win over convinced Catharis. His conviction led eventually to the establishment of the Dominican Order in 1216. The order was to live up to the terms of his famous rebuke, “Zeal must be met by zeal, humility by humility, false sanctity by real sanctity, preaching falsehood by preaching truth.” But Dominic managed only few converts.

In January 1208 the papal legate, Pierre de Castelnau was sent to meet Count Raymond VI of Toulouse, the ruler of the region. De Castelnau excommunicated Raymond as an abettor of heresy. Castelnau was then immediately murdered near Saint Gilles Abbey on his way back to Rome, by a knight in the service of Count Raymond. The Pope, on being informed of it, immediately ordered the legates to preach a Crusade against the Cathars. The Albigensian Crusade (1209-1215) consisted of some twenty-thousand knights and a large number of soldiers and mercenaries, who set off on the Feast of John the Baptist (24 June).

This war threw the whole of the nobility of northern France against that of the south. Possibly inspired by a papal decree stating that all land owned by the Cathars and their Catholic sympathisers could be confiscated, the barons of the north headed south to do battle. It was at this time when Arnaud, the Cistercian abbot-commander was supposed to have been asked how to tell Cathar from Catholic. His notorious reply, recalled by a fellow Cistercian, was: “Kill them all! The Lord will recognize His own.”<sup>65</sup>

After a failed attack, the knights pursued the retreating Cathars back through the open gates of the city of Béziers. The doors of the church of St Mary Magdalene were broken down and the refugees dragged out and slaughtered. Reportedly, 7,000 people died there including many women and children. Elsewhere in the town many more thousands were mutilated and killed. Prisoners were blinded, dragged behind horses, and used for target practice. What remained of the city was razed by fire.

At the end of the first month of the massacre, Arnaud, the abbot-commander, wrote to Pope Innocent III: “Today, Your Holiness, twenty thousand heretics were put to the sword, regardless of rank, age, or sex.”<sup>66</sup> The population of Béziers was then probably no more than 15,000 but with refugees seeking shelter within the city walls, the number claimed, 20,000, is possible. By the end of the third month, the army had accomplished most of the Church’s political goals.

In 1215, the bishops of the Catholic Church met at the Fourth Council of the Lateran under Pope Innocent. One of the key goals of the council was to combat the Cathar heresy—the Cathar’s interpretation of the doctrine of the “resurrection” as meaning “reincarnation”—without explaining exactly how the heresy arose. It was likely that there were still some fugitive Cathars and many who still sympathized with their teachings.

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CE. The term refers to a diverse, syncretistic religious movement comprising various belief systems generally united in the teaching that humans are divine souls trapped in a material world created by an imperfect spirit, the demiurge, frequently identified with the Abrahamic God. The demiurge, often depicted as an embodiment of evil, sometimes as simply imperfect and as benevolent as its inadequacy allows, exists alongside another remote and unknowable supreme being that embodies good. In order to free oneself from the inferior material world, one needs gnosis, or esoteric spiritual knowledge available only to a learned elite, called (amongst the Cathars) the “perfects.” The Cathars generally formed an anti-sacerdotal (not relying on priesthood) party in opposition to the Catholic Church, which they perceived to be morally, spiritually, and politically corrupted. They claimed an apostolic descent from the early founders of Christianity and saw Rome as having betrayed and corrupted the original purity of the message. Hence, their sympathizers called them the “good Christians.”

<sup>65</sup> “Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius.” Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Caesarius Heisterbacensis monachi ordinis Cisterciensis, Dialogus miraculorum*, ed J Strange, Cologne: JM Heberle, vol 2, 1851:296-8. Caesarius was a Cistercian Master of Novices. For refs to other primary documents and the arguments as to whether or not these words were spoken see [http://languedoc-france.info/120502\\_arnaud.htm](http://languedoc-france.info/120502_arnaud.htm).

<sup>66</sup> *Patrologia Latinae cursus completus*, series Latina, 221 vols, ed J-P Migne, Paris, vol 216 col 139.



The Inquisition<sup>67</sup> was established in 1229 to uproot the remaining Cathars. Operating in the south at Toulouse, Albi, Carcassonne and other towns during the whole of the 13th century, and a great part of the 14th, it finally succeeded in uprooting the movement. Cathars who refused to recant were sent to the galleys, hanged, or burned at the stake.<sup>68</sup> Under Pope Gregory IX, the Inquisition was given great powers to suppress the heresy. A campaign started in 1233 to burn the Cathars, especially relapsed ones, even exhuming some bodies for burning. The last known Cathar burning was in 1321.<sup>69</sup>

**3.3 HEALTHY DHARMA, SICK BUDDHISM.** The Buddhist spiritual training in terms of the four noble truths is very much like a medical treatment:

- (1) we detect some ingrained personal failing or lack (the disease or diagnosis);
- (2) the doctor tells us its cause or conditions (the aetiology);
- (3) he explains how we can gain good health (the cure); and
- (4) he prescribes the medication and advises us how to heal ourselves (prescription).

A Buddhist practitioner, as such, constantly examines himself, especially during mindfulness exercises, what aspects of his mind (feelings, perceptions, emotions, or consciousness) is weak or afflicted. Through calm insight, he works at discovering the causes, for example, by bringing into mindful awareness whatever psychological defences that may be holding him back, and so on. Then he works towards wholesome mental healing through the breath meditation, the lovingkindness meditation, and related methods and teachings, and developing spiritual friendship with other practitioners and wholesome people.

Most of us live our religious life in blissful forgetfulness, without any self-examination or wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*). We come and go as if our bodies would always stay as it is, well and energized. We attend crowded talks and retreats run by well known teachers, and then wait for the next announcements for more talks and retreats. Again and again we drink the Dharma soup, but spoon-like our lives remain unchanged all the same. In fact, we doubt we would ever awaken in this life because we have so much defilements.

This “lazy Buddhism” is the result of seeking a refuge outside of ourselves. The problem becomes more interesting and clearer when examined in the light of Buddhist psychology of **complexes**: when we fail to see our potential in awakening in this life through self-effort, we tend to *measure* ourself against others. To “measure” here means to fall into the mindset of comparing what we *have* or *do not have*, so that we perceive others in mostly worldly terms: those who have *more* things, those who are seen more, who are more attractive, more talked about, more heard of, better dressed, better smelling, consume better food, or are better liked, are perceived as “more successful,” as worthy of our emulation and adoration.

This way we are caught in a rut of chasing dreams (subject to the approval of those “better” than us) rather than working on bettering ourselves right now. We are caught in a vicious cycle, like a game of snakes and ladders, but with only snakes without ladders, and we keep returning to square one.

Ridiculous as this may sound, this is the bottom line: *when we measure others we only perceive them in terms of the “signs and details”<sup>70</sup> of the six senses, plastering them over with our preconceived biases.* They are all a sense-bound pre-recorded familiarly neurotic cycle that are self-perpetuating and self-consuming (like a snake biting its own tail) due to our own spiritual lack. There is a Sutta that explains this measuring mentality in simpler and clearer terms.

In **the Ovāda Sutta 3** (S 16.8), Mahā Kassapa, on being invited by the Buddha to admonish the monks, declines and informs him that the monks are not ready. As this the third time, the Buddha does

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<sup>67</sup> The Inquisition was a Roman Catholic tribunal for exposing, punishing and exterminating heresy, which was marked by the severity of questioning and punishment (often involving subterfuge and torture) and lack of rights for the accused. See <http://galileo.rice.edu/chr/inquisition.html>, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/-Inquisition.html>. For illu & refs, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inquisition>. Videos: <http://www.pbs.org/-inquisition/>.

<sup>68</sup> Sean Martin, *The Cathars*. London: Pocket Essentials, 2005: 105-121.

<sup>69</sup> On Pope John Paul II’s apologies for over a 100 of such atrocities committed by the Roman Church, and the karmic effects of such acts, see **Group Karma?** = SD 39.1(8.3.3).

<sup>70</sup> See **Nimitta & Anuvyañjana** = SD 19.14.

not urge Kassapa to change his mind, but the Buddha himself explains the reasons for the monks’ conduct:

Formerly, Kassapa, there were elders of the Order who were forest dwellers, almsfood eaters, rag-robe wearers, triple-robe users, with few wishes, content, lovers of solitude, aloof from society, exertive, and energetic—and they spoke in praise of these qualities.

Then, when such a monk visited a monastery, he was warmly welcomed and honoured as being dedicated to the practice of the Dharma. Then the newly ordained monks would also strive to emulate him in his way of life, and as such would lead to their welfare and happiness for a long time.

But now, Kassapa, the elders are no longer forest dwellers, nor almsfood eaters, nor rag-robe wearers, nor triple-robe users, nor are they with few wishes, nor are they content, nor do they love solitude, nor are they aloof from society, nor are they exertive or energetic—nor do they speak in praise of these qualities.

Now, it is the monk who is well known and famous, one who gains robes, almsfood, lodgings and medical requisites, that the elder monks invite to a seat, saying: “Come, bhikshu. What is this monk’s name? This is an excellent monk. This monk is keen on the company of his brothers in the holy life. Come, bhikshu, here’s a seat, sit down.” Then the newly ordained monks will also strive to emulate him, and that leads to their harm and suffering for a long time.

Kassapa, one would be speaking rightly to say: “Those leading the holy life are ruined by the ruin of those who lead the holy life. Those leading the holy life are defeated by the defeat of those who lead the holy life.” [That is to say, the decline and fall of the monks—as it is, too, in the case of lay Buddhists—by the wrong examples they emulate.] (S 6.18/2:208-210) = SD 1.10(4)

The prophetic tone of such discourses is very clear.<sup>71</sup> As Buddhism today grows more affluent and influential in urban societies and the world, there is a tendency to associate wealth, worldly success and social status with “good karma” and religious attainment. The Buddha’s concern still rings even in our own times:

Now, it is those who are well known and famous, who are wealthy, successful and socially influential, that are respected and emulated. This leads to their harm and suffering for a long time.”<sup>72</sup> (S 6.18/2:208-210)

#### 4 Equality conceit

Although Buddhism, since its beginnings in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE India, speaks of three complexes, modern psychology speaks only of the inferiority and the superiority complexes. Buddhist psychology points to a third complex, *the equality conceit*. A person afflicted with equality conceit will habitually think that “I am as good as you are,” especially when he *unconsciously* thinks that the other person is actually better than he is. This is a draining habit: it takes away our willingness and ability to learn to better ourselves. So we sink down deeper into a sense of self-satisfied complacency. Here I shall discuss only (what I regard as) the most destructive form of the equality conceit, or a self-satisfied complacency, that is, **narcissism**.

<sup>71</sup> See **The Dharma-ending Age** = SD 1.10.

<sup>72</sup> On how gain and honour can ruin the holy life, see M 3:116 f.

**4.1 SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS.** Narcissism is a personality trait, a preoccupied higher regard for and love of oneself, often to the exclusion of the concern for others. The word “narcissism” comes from a character in Greek mythology. Narcissus,<sup>73</sup> a handsome youth, does not think that any of his suitors are worthy of his beauty. When the gods condemn him to look at his reflection in a pool, he stares transfixed at himself lovingly for so long that eventually he simply withers away and dies.

Most specialists regard narcissism as a part of a deepening continuum found in a range of persons, from those arrogantly self-flattered about good their physical health to those with narcissistic personality disorder. People who have a narcissistic personality *style* rather than a narcissistic personality *disorder* are generally psychologically healthy or consider themselves good looking, and may at times be arrogant, proud, shrewd, confident, self-centered and determined to be at the top. They do not, however, have an unrealistic image of their skills and worth, and are not dependent on praise to fuel a healthy self-esteem. We often find such individuals unpleasant or overbearing in certain social, professional or interpersonal encounters: they may be *self-centred*, but they are not necessarily emotionally unhealthy.

**4.2 PATHOLOGICAL NARCISSISM.** The other end of the continuum—that is, narcissistic personality disorder—is a persistent inability to establish a realistic, stable self-image, which as such generates an overdependence on others to regulate their self-esteem. This unrealistic self-image affects how such afflicted people behave and interact with others. Signs and symptoms of narcissistic personality disorder may include:

- Grandiose sense of one’s own abilities or achievements;
- Fantasies about having exceptional power, attractiveness or success;
- Sense of belonging to an exclusive group of people who truly understand each other;
- Need for constant praise;
- Expectations of special treatment;
- Exploitation of other people;
- Lack of empathy for other people;
- Envy of other people or a belief that one is the subject of other people’s envy;
- Haughty or arrogant behaviors.

Individuals with narcissistic personality disorder may come across as being conceited or snobbish. They often monopolize conversations. They may belittle or look down on people they regard as inferior. When they do not receive the special treatment to which they feel entitled, they may become very impatient or angry.

People with narcissistic personality disorder tend to seek out individuals whom they perceive as equal to their own self-image or to whom they attribute the same special talents and qualities they see in themselves. They may insist on having “the best” of everything—car, athletic club or social circles, or in the case of a religious person, the best teacher, the best teaching, the best church or temple.

Their personal relationships and interactions are driven by the need for admiration and praise. Consequently, people with narcissistic personality disorder value others primarily in terms of how well those persons affirm their (the narcissist’s) unrealistic self-image. This limited value of others usually means that people with the disorder are not interested in or are incapable of appreciating the feelings or needs of others. They have an asura-like personality, capable of exploiting others if this helps promote their perceived self-image.

On the other hand, people with narcissistic personality disorder, because they thirst for admiration and praise, are very vulnerable to criticism. If someone criticizes a person’s work, for example, he may take this comment as an assault on an image that needs to be protected at all costs, and may react with feelings of shame, humiliation or sadness, or may show rage, or aggression, that is, act in an emotionally defensive manner.

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<sup>73</sup> In Greek mythology, **Narcissus** (Gk, Narkissos, Νάρκισσος), was a hero of the city of Thespieae in Boeotia (nw of Athens), who was renowned for his beauty. Several versions of his myth have survived: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*; Pausanias’ *Guide to Greece* (9.31.7); and in the Oxyrhynchus papyri.

Some specialists have described individuals diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder as “shy narcissists,” “closet narcissists” or “deflated narcissists.” Such persons, like others with narcissistic personality disorder, have a grandiose, unrealistic sense of their abilities, achievements and worth, and they often feel disdain for others whom they perceive as less exceptional. They also have vulnerable self-esteem and are very sensitive to criticism. However, these individuals do not seek admiration, or overtly express their sense of superiority. Specialists are not agreed whether “shy narcissism” is indeed a subtype of narcissistic personality disorder. Anyway, those with such a personality trait, and they keep up a very private limited self, would certainly limit their personal development.

A common symptom of a narcissistic personality or activity centred around a narcissist, is that of **denial** towards real problems or difficulties concerning the person, the group or the activity. Any situation that is perceived as problematic or politically incorrect is likely to be tacitly pushed aside or explained away, or there the management hierarchy has a filtering system so that complaints, injustices or problems rarely, if ever, reach the decisive centre. The danger in such a situation where things never bend, is that they usually in due course suddenly break, with disastrous consequences.

**4.3 CAUSES AND DIAGNOSIS OF NARCISSISM.** Scientists do not know the exact cause of narcissistic personality disorder. Researchers have identified certain childhood developmental factors and parenting behaviors that may contribute to the disorder, such as:

- An oversensitive temperament at birth;
- Overindulgence and overvaluation by parents;
- Valued by parents as a means to regulate their own self-esteem;
- Excessive admiration that is never balanced with realistic feedback;
- Unpredictable or unreliable care-giving from parents;
- Severe emotional abuse in childhood;
- Being praised for perceived exceptional looks or talents by adults;
- Learning manipulative behaviors from parents.

A narcissistic personality disorder may be only a symptom along with other psychological problems, such as bipolar disorder<sup>74</sup> or depressive disorder. They may also have:

- Suicidal thoughts;
- Impaired interpersonal and familial relationships;
- Chronic dysphoria (constantly feeling unwell or unhappy);
- Euphoria with those close or desirable to them, but coldness to others;
- Emotionally abusive behaviors.

A diagnosis is most often made by a psychotherapist, usually a psychiatrist, psychologist or licensed clinical social worker. In addition to interviewing an individual who may have narcissistic personality disorder, the psychotherapist may depend on observations, psychological tests and interviews with significant others for a proper diagnosis. Narcissistic personality disorder may be present in us if there is evidence of five or more of the following nine characteristics:

- Grandiose self-image;
- Fantasies about having exceptional qualities;
- Sense of being so special that only other special people can understand or relate to him or her;
- Need for excessive admiration and attention;
- Sense of entitlement;
- Exploitation of other people;
- Lack of empathy;

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<sup>74</sup> Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a psychological disorder that causes unusual shifts in a person’s mood, energy, and ability to function. Different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through, the symptoms of bipolar disorder are severe. They can result in damaged relationships, poor job or school performance, and even suicide. Bipolar disorder, however, can be treated, and people with this illness can lead full and productive lives. See <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/bipolar.cfm>.

- Envy of other people, or a belief that we are the subject of other people’s envy;
- Arrogant behaviors or attitudes;
- Desire for control; hence, has a tendency to accumulate wealth.

Most specialists agree that *grandiosity* is the central feature that distinguishes narcissistic personality disorder from related disorders that share some of the same symptoms. A diagnosis also depends on the presence of these features in an ongoing pattern since early adulthood and in a variety of contexts.

The disorder is almost never diagnosed in adolescents. Although teenagers may exhibit narcissistic personality traits, these features are usually corrected by experiences that influence adult personality development. Narcissism becomes a problem when it continues into adulthood. It is difficult to point out to a person that he has a narcissistic personality disorder, much less to actually help him correct the narcissistic behavior or his unrealistic self-image.

Narcissism is the most troubling form of conceit or complex, as it is rooted in the deepest of the three unwholesome roots, that of wrong view (*diṭṭhi, gāha*), by which we are trapped in the mindset, “**This my self**” (*eso me attā*). We unconsciously regard our self-image as a permanent feature so that we do not need to change or grow, and that we are as good as the best or far better than others. It is as such a combination of two conceits, the superiority complex and the equality complex: we effectively live asura lives.

There are three ways by which we can prepare the ground for healing those afflicted with narcissistic personality disorder:

- (1) Always show a warm, patient, friendly and sincerely appreciative attitude before them.
- (2) Constantly speak in positive terms to them.
- (3) Mindfully and constantly, radiate lovingkindness to them (whether present or not).

In the Suttas, the pupil is admonished to “minister” (*paccupatṭhātabba*) his teacher *through physical acts of lovingkindness, through words of lovingkindness, through a heart of lovingkindness*.<sup>75</sup> Although this should be our general attitude towards the teacher, it should not stop there. Indeed, if it *does* stop with the teacher, then, we are ourselves limited by a debilitating complex.

There is a vital healing quality to the cultivating of lovingkindness towards those afflicted with narcissism, or any complex, for that matter. A healing aura surrounds the person who constantly cultivates lovingkindness, and this is perceivable on a mental level. I call this “healing through seeing (*dassana*).” Or rather, it marks the beginning of the path to self-healing, when the narcissist consciously tells others, first as a reflection, then directly, that, “You *are* better than me in some ways, and that I can learn some good qualities from you, too.”

The various complexes we have discussed, especially pathological narcissism, is the result of the wrong view that there is some kind of enduring self. That we *cannot* change, or that this is the best we can ever be. Understandably, Buddhist psychology places a great emphasis on self-examination, self-diagnosis, and self-healing. The bottom line is that we *can* change. We may be sick, but we can get better.

Furthermore, Buddhism has a rich range of teachings and terminology to discuss and explain various problems of the “self,” and provides an effective range of mind-training methods for self-liberation. This is why a growing number of specialists in the mind sciences are attracted to, and this is what we shall examine next.

## **5 Buddhist-inspired Western theories**

Over the last century, western psychology and related medical fields have progressed impressively in proposing various theories of consciousness and therapies of mind-healing. However, such progress is often hindered or skewed by their inability to surmount the Cartesian ghost of *the abiding self*. Since the turn of the 20th century, western scholars and scientists have been fascinated by the potential that Buddhism has—with its vast terminology relating to the mind, the various theories and teachings regarding consciousness, and, above all, effective methods (such as mindfulness meditation) for self-healing—as an

<sup>75</sup> D 16.5.14/2:144, 31.33/3:191; Tha 1041-1043.

ally in the growth of the mind sciences. In other words, *they find that Buddhist concepts sharpen western theories, and Buddhist methods enhance western therapy.*<sup>76</sup>

**Dr Stephanie Rude**, an assistant professor of counseling psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas, USA, for example, sees the advantages of the Buddhist doctrine (more specifically, she refers to Tibetan Buddhism) that *the self*—a belief in something permanent, stable and integral to a person—hinders happiness. “When you read Buddhist writings,” Rude explains, “you get a sense of self as an obstacle in achieving fulfillment.” This is, in other words, a quantum leap in perspective away from that of the West, where the concept of self-esteem or a “healthy” self is central to both theory and clinical practice. Yet, consistent with the Buddhist view, some western research suggests that focusing on the self can compound negative emotions, explains Rude.

“A depressed person may make himself feel worse by interpreting his suffering as meaning he has failed in some way,” says Rude, explaining that a trained Buddhist monk might choose to see his suffering as an inevitable part of being human. Westerners are conditioned, says Rude, to take suffering more personally—to *think about suffering as something about themselves*. Avoiding a concept of the self as something immutable and central may help us to feel less harmed by the slings and arrows of misfortune, suggests Rude. The Buddhist acceptance of mental suffering as an unavoidable condition of life, rather than a reflection on their personal failings, may help monks face failure and pain with equanimity.

“It’s a big challenge to Western researchers to figure out how these ideas might be used without losing too much in translation,” says Rude. Eventually, she says, psychologists may be able to use techniques cut on the teeth of Buddhist theories to teach people with depression to reconceptualize their ideas of self in ways that promote mental health.

**Richard Davidson**, a psychology professor at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and pioneer in Buddhist mind science, agrees. Indeed, he says that interdisciplinary understanding between Western psychology and Buddhism—not just borrowing concepts—can be beneficial to both traditions. Furthermore he hopes that psychologists’ work with Tibetan Buddhist monks and scholars can serve as a model for future discourse between scientists and other contemplative religions—conversations that could lead to a sharpened understanding of cognition, emotion and consciousness. “There is a lot we can learn from these traditions,” says Davidson. “The time is right for collaboration.”

## 6 Analysis of conceit

**6.1 MENTAL HEALTH.** In the **Roga Sutta** (A 4.157.1), the Buddha, referring to the two prevailing kinds of diseases (*roga*), declares that, in spiritual terms, “mental health” (*cetasika ārogya*) is rare: *only the arhats are truly mentally healthy*:

Bhikshus, there are these two kinds of illnesses [diseases]. What are the two?

Illness of the body and illness of the mind.

Bhikshus, there are to be seen beings who can claim to be **physically healthy** [illness-free] for a year, ...two years, ...three years, ...four years, ...five years, ...ten years, ...twenty years, ...thirty years, ...forty years, ...fifty years, ...who can claim to be healthy for a hundred years.

But bhikshus, hard to find are those beings who can claim to be **mentally healthy** for even a moment except for those [arhats] whose mental cankers are destroyed. (A 4.157.1/2:142 f)<sup>77</sup>

For this reason, the **Vibhaṅga Commentary** states that “the ordinary person is like one mad” (*ummatta-ko viya hi puthujjano*) because without considering what is right [connected] or not right [unconnected], he, due to the force of clinging, creates karma out of desire for existence.<sup>78</sup> In short, the ignorant ordinary

<sup>76</sup> See eg Dingfelder 2003. The rest of this section is excerpted from her article.

<sup>77</sup> **The Sall’atthana S** similarly mentions 2 kinds of pain (*dukkha*) (physical and mental) and how to deal with them: S 36.6/4:207-210 = SD 5.5.

<sup>78</sup> *So idaṃ yuttaṃ idaṃ ayuttan ti avicāretvā yassa kassaci upādānassa vasena yaṃ kiñci bhavaṃ patthetvā yaṃ kiñci kammaṃ karoti yeva* (VbhA 186).

person is *mad* because *he acts out of greed, hate and delusion*, as stated in **the Āditta,pariyāya Sutta** (S 35.28).<sup>79</sup>

The three unwholesome roots are fed by the latent tendencies of lust, aversion and ignorance,<sup>80</sup> and which in turn are fed by the unwholesome roots. They feed one another, in the manner of the uroboros (the snake biting its tail). Unmindful thinking feeds the latent tendencies, which turn fuel the mind with a proliferation (*papañca*) of thoughts and mental chatter. These in turn put our body and speech on auto-pilot, so that we relate with others and the world mostly in terms of greed (liking), hate (disliking) and delusion (not caring or confusion). We have discussed this in some detail elsewhere.<sup>81</sup>

As the Roga Sutta warns us, the minds of the unawakened (the non-arhats, especially those who are not yet on the path to awakening)<sup>82</sup> are all somehow rooted in greed, hate and delusion, which in turn skew our relationships with others so that we are always *measuring* ourselves against others by way of the three conceits.

**6.2 THE NINE CONCEITS.** The conceits are called “discriminations” (*vidhā*) in such suttas as **the Soṇa Sutta 1** (S 22.49),<sup>83</sup> **the Vidhā Sutta 1** (S 45.162),<sup>84</sup> and **the Vidhā Sutta 2** (S 46.41).<sup>85</sup> **The Nid-  
desa** and **the Vibhaṅga** go on to list all the possible manifestations of these discriminations or conceits (*māna*), totalling nine of them (the ninefold conceit, *nava, vidhā māna*). **The Vibhaṅga** gives two passages on the three conceits or discriminations. The first defines them in terms of the nine conceits<sup>86</sup> (Vbh §§866-878), while the second is simply a summary list (Vbh §962). The Vibhaṅga defines the three conceits as follows:

**866**        Therein what is **the conceit, “I am superior”** (*seyyo ’ham asmī ti*)?

<sup>87</sup>Here, a certain person, by birth, or by clan, or by good family, or by personality [looks and elegance], or by wealth, or by ability to recite mantras and texts, or by sphere of work [professionalism], or by skill in the arts [the fine arts and humanities], or by scientific status, by learning [academic qualification], by wit [intelligence], or on any other ground, works up conceit.

<sup>79</sup> SD 35.28/4:19 f = SD 1.3.

<sup>80</sup> On the latent tendencies, see **Sallatthena S** (S 36.6) = SD 5.5 Intro (3 kinds) & **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18.8) = SD 6.14 (7 kinds).

<sup>81</sup> See **SD 19.1(3)**.

<sup>82</sup> Those who are on the path to awakening are the arhat (fully liberated), the non-returner (after death is reborn in the Pure Abodes and does not return here), the once-returner (one more life to go before awakening), and the stream-winner (7 more lives at most). **The arhat** (*arahata*) has overcome **the 10 fetters** (*dasa samyojanā*), viz: (1) self-identity view (*sakkāya, diṭṭhi*), (2) persistent doubt (*vicikicchā*), (3) attachment to rules and rituals (*sīla-b, bata, -parāmāsa*), (4) sensual lust (*kāma, rāga*), (5) repulsion (*paṭigha*), (6) greed for form existence (*rūpa, rāga*), (7) greed for formless existence (*arūpa, rāga*), (8) conceit (*māna*), (9) restlessness (or remorse) (*uddhacca*), (10) ignorance (*avijjā*) (S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377). In some places, no 5 (*kāma, rāga*) is replaced by ill will (*vyāpāda*). **The non-returner** (*anāgāmi*) has overcome the first 5, ie, the lower fetters (*orambhāgiya*) (see **Ānāpānasati S**, M 118.10 = 7.13); the rest are called the higher fetters (*uddhambhāgiya*). **The once-returner** (*sakadāgāmi*) has broken the first 3 fetters and partly weakened the foll 2 (4-5). **The stream-winner** (*sotāpanna*) has broken the first 3 fetters. On types of saints, see **Kiṭṭagiri S** (M 70/1:473-481) = SD 11.1 Intro (5); also **Laṭukikopama S** (M 66.17/1:454) = SD 28.11.

<sup>83</sup> S 22.49/3:48 f.

<sup>84</sup> S 45.162/5:56.

<sup>85</sup> S 46.41/5:98.

<sup>86</sup> Vll *nava, vidhā mānā* (the ninefold conceit), or *nava vidhamānā* (the nine discriminations).

<sup>87</sup> *Taṭṭha katamo seyyo ’ham asmī ti māno: idh ’ekacco jātiyā vā gottena vā kola, puttīyena vā vaṇṇa, pokkhara-tāya vā dhanena vā ajjhenena vā kamm ’āyatanena vā sipp ’āyatanena vā vijjā-t, ṭhānena vā sutena vā paṭibhānena vā aññatar ’aññatarena vatthunā mānaṃ jappeti, yo eva, rūpo māno maññanā maññitattaṃ unnati unnāmo, dhajo sampaggāho ketu, kamyatā cittassa ayaṃ vuccati seyyo ’ham asmī ti māno.* A similar but shorter def at Dhs §1116/-197 f. On the negative meanings of *kamm ’āyatana*, *sipp ’āyatana*, *vijjā-t, ṭhāna*, *suta*, and *paṭibhāna*, see VbhA 2407/490.

Such conceit, thoughts of conceit, state of being conceited, haughtiness, “flag-raising,” arrogance [assumption], the desire for self-glorification [a mind desiring a banner].<sup>88</sup>

This is called the superiority conceit.

**867** Therein what is **the conceit, “I am equal”** (*sadiso’ham asmî ti*)?

Here, a certain person (as stated in §866) works up conceit.

Such conceit, thoughts of conceit, state of being conceited, haughtiness, “flag-raising,” arrogance [assumption], the desire for self-glorification [a mind desiring a banner].

This is called the equality conceit.

**868** Therein what is **the conceit, “I am inferior”** (*hīno’ham asmî ti*)?

Here, a certain person (as stated in §866) works up the conceit of baseness (*omāna*).

Such conceit, thoughts of conceit, state of being conceited, haughtiness, “flag-raising,” arrogance [assumption], the desire for self-glorification [a mind desiring a banner].

This is called the inferiority conceit.

(Vbh §§866-868/353)

The Vibhaṅga then lists the nine conceits as follows:

In one who is superior [as stated in §866], there is the conceit, thus: (1) “I am superior.”

(2) “I am equal.”

(3) “I am inferior.”

In one who is equal [as stated in §866], there is the conceit, thus: (4) “I am superior.”

(5) “I am equal.”

(6) “I am inferior.”

In one who is inferior [as stated in §866], there is the conceit, thus: (7) “I am superior.”

(8) “I am equal.”

(9) “I am inferior.”

(Vbh 869-877/353-355; 962/389 f, slightly abridged)

Buddhaghosa, in **the Vibhaṅga Commentary**, defines the nine conceits as follows:

(1) Superiority complex arises in one who is **superior to others**, such as a king (one in power) or a renunciant (monk, etc). A king (or any powerful person), for example, might think of his superiority on account of his kingdom or his wealth or his mounts (horses, elephants, etc). A renunciant (or any religious person) might think of his superiority in terms of his moral virtue, his ascetic practices, etc.<sup>89</sup> In either case, each might consider, “Who is there equal to me?”

(2) Equality complex arises in such a superior person, too. A king, on account of his territory, or wealth, or mounts, might pride, “What difference is there between me and other kings?” And a renunciant, on account of his moral virtue, ascetic practices, etc, might pride, “What difference is there between me and other monks?”

(3) Inferiority complex arises in such a superior person, too. A king, seeing that he is not fully endowed with territory, or wealth, or mounts, might pride, “I have only the mere pleasure of the name of king. What kind of king am I?” And a renunciant, on account of his lack of gain and honour, might pride, “I am merely called Dharma-speaker, learned, senior elder [mahathera]. What kind of Dharma-speaker am I? What kind of learned person am I? What kind of senior elder am I? I have neither gain nor honour!”

(4) Superiority complex arises in one who is **equal to others**, such as a courtier, and so on. A courtier, or a countryman, on account of wealth, vehicles, mounts, etc, might pride, “What other royal servant is there like me?”

<sup>88</sup> A banner (*ketu*) is the flag that stands highest above all the others. (DhsA 372)

<sup>89</sup> **Rūpa S** (A 4.65/2:71) = SD 3.14.7 & Comy = SD 3.14.8.



(5) Equality complex arises in one who is equal to others, such as a courtier...[who] might pride, “What difference is there between me and the others?”

(6) Inferiority complex arises in one who is equal to others, such as a courtier...[who] might pride, “I am merely in name a courtier. I have neither food nor clothing! What kind of courtier am I?”

(7) Superiority complex arises in one who is **inferior to others**, such as a slave, and so on. A slave, on account of his father or his mother, might pride, “What other slave is there like me? Others become slaves on account of their bellies, when they are unable to earn a living, but I am superior because I am so by descent.”

(8) Equality complex arises in one who is inferior to others, such as a slave...[who] might pride, “Because of pure slavehood on both sides by descent, what difference is there between me and such and such a slave?”

(9) Inferiority complex arises in one who is inferior to others, such as a slave...[who] might pride, “I have come to slavery on account of my belly. But on my mother’s and father’s sides, I do not have slavery. What kind of slave am I?”

And like the slave, even so the Pukkusa [the refuse-removers] and the Caṇḍāla [the outcastes], and so on, pride in this manner, too.

Here, the Vibhaṅga Commentary goes on to state that only the following three are types of **true conceit** (*yāthāva,māna*), that is, founded pride, namely:

the superiority complex of the superior;  
the equality complex of the equal; and  
the inferiority complex of the inferior.

The rest are types of *false conceit [unfounded pride]*.

While false conceit is abandoned by the path of stream-winning, true conceit is abandoned only by the path of arhathood. (VbhA 486 f)

Neither the Vibhaṅga nor its Commentary explains what is meant by “false conceit” (*ayāthāva,-māna*). **The Dhamma,saṅgaṇī Commentary**, in fact, seems to disagree with Buddhaghosa (VbhA 486 f). After stating, in similar terms, the nine conceits, the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī Commentary goes on to say:

In the superior, the superiority conceit is alone a true conceit, the others are false. In the equal, the equality conceit is alone true. In the inferior, the inferiority conceit is alone true.

What does this mean?

That the three conceits may arise in one, it is said. But in the Khuddaka,vatthu (of the Vibhaṅga), in the classification of the first conceit, it is said that one conceit [that is, “only one true conceit”] arises in the three persons.<sup>90</sup> (DhsA 372)

This is essentially a scholastic problem as the Suttas only mention the three kinds of conceit. The ninefold is, however, helpful in listing all the possible occurrences of conceit in a person—a tendency common in the Abhidhamma tradition. Where the Abhidhamma inclines towards philosophical discussion (as here), we can always work out a philosophical solution. However, in keeping with the original vision of this translation series, we shall only work at the spiritual solution to this apparent problem.

“**True conceit**” (*yāthāva,māna*) here refers to the person’s state of mind, that of conceit, that is reflective of his true status in society. For example, a powerful person, knowing his status, feels proud of it; one who shares power with another, feels proud about it; and one who is powerless, prides in this fact (perhaps with the reasoning that he does not have to worry about the great responsibilities that come with great power).

Understandably, if one were powerful but feel inferior about it, say desiring more power, then it is not true conceit, but simply a desire for more power: this is *greed*, not conceit. Or, if one were equal to others, say, in power, but feels that one is more powerful than everyone else, it is not true conceit, but probably a

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<sup>90</sup> *Ekassa tayo mānā uppajjantī ti kathitaṃ. Khuddaka,vatthuke pana paṭhamaka,māna,bhājanīye eko māno tiṇṇaṃ janānaṃ uppajjatī ti kathito.*

*delusion* of grandeur. Or, if one were powerless and were to pride in that powerlessness, it would not be *real conceit*, but, in reality, dislikes those in power, which would be *hate*.

However, for one who is, say, wealthy, the pride that he is better off than others would clearly be *superiority conceit*. If this same person were to feel proud of the fact that another (say, his brother) is richer than he is, it is *inferiority conceit*. Even if this same person merely *thinks* that he as rich another (but in reality is not so), it is still *equality conceit*. The same pattern works for the other two kinds of persons.

**6.3 OTHER FORMS OF CONCEIT.** Besides the key term *māna* (conceit), a number of other related terms are found in the Suttas, and we shall now briefly examine them (especially those found in the Vibhaṅga and its Commentary).

(1) *Atimāna* (haughtiness), explains the Vibhaṅga Commentary, arises on account of one’s birth, etc, regardless of one’s real status. Hence, the verb *atimaññati* means “he is haughty,” that is, he excessively prides in his birth, etc, thinking, “There is none equal to me.”<sup>91</sup>

(2) *Mānâtīmāna* (pride upon pride) arises, for example, in this way: “Formerly he was my equal. Now I am foremost, and he is inferior.” This pride, as such, grew dependent on previous pride of equality, like heaping a new burden upon an old one.<sup>92</sup>

(3) *Omāna* (self-effacement) (Vbh §881/355) is described in the same manner as *hīna,māna* (pride of lowliness) (Vbh 868/353). But, for the sake of those who are teachable, says the Commentary, this pride is stated as *self-effacement*.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, this should be understood here as “self-effacement” when it occurs as being proud of one’s lowliness, thinking (reflexively) thus, “You have birth (*jāti*), but it is like that of a crow’s; you have clan (*gotta*), but it is like a Caṇḍāla clan; you have a voice, but it is like that of a crow’s.”  
(VbhA §2398/488)

(4) *Adhimāna* (over-estimation or arrogance) refers to the perception that one has attained that which is not attained (*appatte patta,saññitā*), especially in regards to misperceiving that one has understood the four noble truths when the reality is that this is not so. Or, thinking that one has done the work of attaining the path to awakening when in reality one has not. Or, that one has fully realized the four noble truths when the reality is that one has not. Or, that one has directly attained to the path of arhathood when the reality is that one has not. This is also called *adhigata,māna* (the pride of achievement).<sup>94</sup>

(5) *Asmi,māna* (self-conceit) can arise by way of the thought, “I am in the form” (*rūpe asmî ti māno*), or “I exist as form” (that is, the abiding soul exists in the form of a body), so that there is the pride, thus: “I am form” (*aham rūpam*). The Vibhaṅga notes that this is synonymous with *chanda* (zeal), that is, the zeal (or will) that accompanies the pride. It is also the same as *anusaya* (latent tendency). All that is stated here applies mutatis mutandis to the other four aggregates, namely, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness.<sup>95</sup>

(6) *Micchā,māna* (false pride) refers to conceit (or over-confidence) related to an evil sphere of work (*pāpaka kamm’āyatana*) (that is, those that harm life); an evil sphere of arts (*sipp’āyatana*) (that is, skill and industry in making the tools and means of harming life); sorcery (*vijjā-t,thāna*) that harms others; wrong learning (*suta*), that is, those connected with violence, lust and so on; evil talk (*paṭibhāna*), that is, those regarding gossips and sense-pleasure; wrong practices (*sīla*), such as goat-asceticism and ox-asceticism; wrong vows (*vata*), such as goat-vows and ox-vows; and wrong view (*ditṭhi*), that is, any based on any of the 62 wrong views.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>91</sup> VbhA §2396/487 ad Vbh §879/355.

<sup>92</sup> VbhA §2397/487 ad Vbh §880/355.

<sup>93</sup> VbhA §2398/488 ad Vbh §881/355.

<sup>94</sup> VbhA §2399/488 ad Vbh §882/355.

<sup>95</sup> VbhA §2400/488 f ad Vbh §883/356.

<sup>96</sup> VbhA §2407/490 ad Vbh §884/356.

Having listed the common manifestations of conceit, it should be pointed out here that such conceits arise *not* because of the self (simply because there is *no* abiding self or soul). These conceits, the Abhidhamma texts and Commentaries remind us, arise on account of the mind, not the self (*sā pana cittassa, na attano*);<sup>97</sup> they arise on account of the mind, not a being (*sā pana cittassa, na sattassa*).<sup>98</sup>

In summary, it should be said that conceit arises on account of a feeling of self-importance, or as “clinging to the importance of ‘oneself.’”<sup>99</sup> While conceit often arises when we compare ourselves with others, it may also arise when there is no comparing, that is, when we have a self-centred focus, as in the case of narcissism.

In this sense, the Buddhist conception of *conceit* as a complex is much broader than Adler’s, not only in that early Buddhism speaks of three conceits and its various other forms (Adler speaks only of two) [2.1], but that the Buddhist conception of conceit covers an existential as well as psychological dimensions. It reflects how a person sees himself and others, and how he responds to others in terms of his perception of them.

**6.4 MENTAL INTOXICATION AS CONCEIT.** The Vibhaṅga Commentary, glossing on *mada* (mental intoxication) equates it with conceit (*māna*) (VbhA §2315/465). The Commentary then lists 27 forms of intoxications in terms of conceit, as follows.

**(1) *Jāti,mada*** (intoxication with birth), that is, class consciousness. In the Buddha’s times, this refers to one of the four classes (*jāti*) or castes (*vaṇṇa*). A person intoxicated with his class would think, “There is no kshatriya (noble or ruling class member) like me. The other ruling class members have just become so. But I am one on account of lineage.” So, too, with the brahmins (priestly class, or those in the academic profession), the vaiśyas (the entrepreneurs, merchants, and business class) and the śudras (working class, especially the civil servants).<sup>100</sup>

**The Soṇa,daṇḍa S** (D 4) records a classic case of class (or status) consciousness. The brahmin Soṇa,daṇḍa, on meeting the Buddha, is initially reluctant to ask him anything for fear of saying the wrong thing, and so losing face (“the assembly would find fault with me”), which would in turn “lessen my income”! Indeed, at the end of the discourse, even after having gone for refuge, he tells the Buddha that he would in public show his respect to the Buddha in other ways than rising, so that he does not lose face before other brahmins! We have a very status-conscious brahmin here.<sup>101</sup>

**(2) *Gotta,mada*** (intoxication with family name), that is, pride or conceit in our family or clan name. A kshatriya, for example, might pride in the thought (*mānaṃ karoti*), “I am of the Koṇḍañña clan. I am of the Ādicca clan.” Or, a brahmin might pride in the thought, “I am of the Kassapa clan. I am of the Bhāradvāja clan.” So, too, those of the business class or the working class, and those belonging to the business guilds, “I am born of such and such a guild.”<sup>102</sup> **The Ambaṭṭha Sutta** (D 3) records how the arrogant young Ambaṭṭha Māṇava, on account of his gotra (clan), is blatantly rude to the Buddha, and learns a few painful lessons on this account.<sup>103</sup>

**(3) *Ārogya,mada*** (intoxication with health), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with our health, thus: “I am healthy. The others are unhealthy. There is no sickness in me, not even for a moment it takes for milk to issue when one tugs at a cow’s udder.”

**(4) *Yobbana,mada*** (intoxication with youth), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with our youth, “I am young. The others are like a tree growing on a cliff. But I’m in the first stage of life.”

<sup>97</sup> Nm 1:212 = DhsA 372.

<sup>98</sup> VbhA §1552/317.

<sup>99</sup> “Conceit, *māna*, is clinging to the importance of ‘oneself.’ This may arise when one compares oneself with others, but also when there is no comparing.” (Nina van Gorkom, personal email communication, 2 Jul 2007.)

<sup>100</sup> VbhA §2319/465.

<sup>101</sup> D 4.26/1:126 = SD 30.5.

<sup>102</sup> VbhA §2320/465 f.

<sup>103</sup> D 3/1:87-110 = SD 21.3.

(5) *Jvita,mada* (intoxication with life), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with our life, thus: “I have lived long. I am living long. I shall live long. I have lived happily, I am living happily. I shall live happily.”

(6) *Lābha,mada* (intoxication with gain), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with gain, thus: “I am one who has gain. The others gain little. But there is no limit to my gain.”

(7) *Sakkāra,mada* (intoxication with honour), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with honour, thus: “Whatever others may obtain, I obtain requisites of robes, etc, which are well made and superior.”

(8) *Garu,kāra,mada* (intoxication with respect), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with benefit, thus: “People go stepping on the back of other monks’ feet, and do not pay them homage as a recluse. But they pay homage on seeing me. They think that I am to be treated as weighty (*garu*) like a stone umbrella, and difficult to approach like a mass of blaze.”

(9) *Purekkhāra,mada* (intoxication with deference), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with deference, thus: “When a problem arises, it is only solved with my leadership. When they go on almsround, they do so with me only leading and they surrounding me.”

(10) *Parivāra,mada* (intoxication with following), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with following, thus: “Before, as a layman with a great following, a hundred persons, a thousand persons, followed me. But as a renunciant, a hundred recluses, a thousand recluses follow me. The others have little following. I have both a great following and a pure following.”

(11) *Bhoga,mada* (intoxication with wealth), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with hoarding wealth, thus: “The others do not get even enough for their own use, but there is no limit to my wealth in store.”

(12) *Vaṇṇa,mada* (intoxication with beauty), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with beauty, thus: “Others are of poor complexion, unsightly, but I am handsome and pleasing. The others are without virtuous qualities, lacking fame, but my reputation is known amongst gods and humans, thus: ‘This elder is greatly learned in this way, of virtuous conduct in this way, devoted to asceticism in this way.’”

(13) *Suta,mada* (intoxication with learning), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with learning, thus, “Others have little learning, but I am very learned.”

(14) *Paṭibhāna,mada* (intoxication with wit), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with wit, thus: “Others have little wit, but there is no limit to my wit.”

(15) *Rattaññu,mada* (intoxication with seniority), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with seniority, thus: “I am very senior (*aham rattaññū*). I know the division of night and day, and the conjunction of constellations, and the moments concerning such and such a Buddha’s lineage, such and such a king’s lineage, of such and such a country, of such and such a village.”

(16) *Piṇḍapāṭika,mada* (intoxication with almsfood), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with almsfood, thus: “The other monks are intermittent almsfood-takers, but I am a natural one.”

(17) *Anavaññāta,mada* (intoxication with being blamefree), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with being blamefree, thus: “Others are despised, looked down upon, but I am not.”

(18) *Iriyāpatha,mada* (intoxication with deportment), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with deportment, thus: “Others have an unpleasant, but mine is pleasant.”

(19) *Iddhi,mada* (intoxication with success), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with success, thus: “Others are like crows with clipped wings, but I am very successful and mighty.”

(20) *Upaṭṭhāka,mada* (intoxication with supporters), that is, the conceit arising in connection with supporters. In the case of a lay person, for example, a guild chief, may think, “I place the rest of the men, and move them about.” The case of a renunciant is the same as the following:

(20) *Yasa,mada* (intoxication with fame), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with fame. For example, a certain renunciant becomes chief, and think, “I am chief. The other monks will carry out my instructions.”

(21) *Sīla,mada* (intoxication with moral virtue), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with moral virtue, thus: “The others are immoral; but I am morally virtuous.”

(22) *Jhāna,mada* (intoxication with dhyana), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with dhyana, thus: “Others do not have one-pointedness of mind for event a moment that it takes a cock to sip water, but I am an attainer of access concentration and dhyana.”

(23) *Sippa,mada* (intoxication with the arts), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with the arts, thus: “The others lack any skill in the arts, but I am skilled in the arts.”

(24) *Ārohana,mada* (intoxication with growth), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with physical growth, thus: “Other beings are short, but I am tall.”

(25) *Parīṇāha,mada* (intoxication with girth), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with physical girth, thus: “Other beings may be short or tall, but I am well proportioned like the girth of a banyan tree.”

(26) *Sanṭhāna,mada* (intoxication with shape), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with physical shape, thus: “Other beings are poorly shaped, misshapen, but my body is agreeable and pleasing.”

(27) *Pāripūri,mada* (intoxication with perfection), that is, the conceit that arises with being intoxicated with physical perfection, thus: “The body of other beings have many faults, but as regards my body, not event the tip of hair is faultless.”

**6.5 CONCEIT AND CHARISMA.** The notion of conceit (*māna*) has close connections with charisma,<sup>104</sup> a notion well described in **the Rūpa Sutta** (A 4.65). It lists four measures (*pamāṇā*), that is, four ways that one attributes charisma to another, and becomes satisfied or “inspired” (*pasanna*) with that person. There are, says the sutta, four kinds of persons who attribute charisma to another, namely:<sup>105</sup>

- (1) One who measures by **looks** (*rūpa*) [form] and is inspired by it.
- (2) One who measures by **voice** (*ghosa*) and is inspired by it.
- (3) One who measures by **austerity** (*lūkha*) [external holiness] and is inspired by it.
- (4) One who measures by **truth** (*dhamma*) and is inspired by it.

(A 2:71; cf. Pug 7, 53; Tha 469-472; DhA 1:114; SnA 242)

The first three are popular criteria but faulty and personal at best: only the fourth is the true standard for one’s faith or devotion to another. The Buddha, however, enjoys all four measures from the faithful who know him although he clearly disapproves of them (as evident from this Sutta).

The four measures of charisma are explained in the **Puggala Paññatti** and the Commentaries as follows:

What sort of person measures by **form** (*rūpa*) [looks] and is inspired by them?

Here a person, having seen the height, the breadth, the shape, or the whole (of a person), grasping such measures (*pamāṇa*), feels inspired.

Such a person is one measuring by and inspired by looks.

What sort of person measures by **voice** (*ghosa*) and is inspired by it?

Here a person, on the basis of comments, of praise, of applause, of compliments of others, grasping such measures, feel inspired.

Such a person is one measuring by and inspired by voice.

What sort of person measures by **austerity** (*lūkha*) [external holiness] and is inspired by it?

Here a person, having seen the austerity (or roughness) of the robes, of the almsbowl, of the lodgings, of various (other) austerities [things difficult to do, including “miracles”], grasping such measures, feel inspired.

Such a person is one measuring by and inspired by austerity.

What sort of person measures by **truth** (*dhamma*) and is inspired by it?

Having seen the moral virtue, the mental concentration, the wisdom (of another), grasping such measures, one feels inspired.

<sup>104</sup> For a monograph, see Piyasilo, *Charisma in Buddhism*, Petaling Jaya: Dharmafarer Enterprises, 1992h.

<sup>105</sup> See **The Teacher of the Teaching?** = SD 3.14(7). On the relationship of measures (*pamāṇa*) to conceit (*māna*), see **Pubba Sambodha S 1** (S 35.13) = SD 14.9 Intro (3).

Such a person is one measuring by and inspired by the truth.

(Pug 53 f; PugA 229 f; cf A 2:70; SnA 242; DhA 3:113 f)

Charisma only works with conceit, that is, the conceit in us induces us to measure others in the manner mentioned [3.3-3.4]. Measuring self and others is based on the notion of duality, that is, as a result of not understanding not-self (*anattā*). When we measure yourself against others, we will often perceive some kind of lack inside ourself, and when we conceive that what we lack or need is found in another, we have effectively attributed charisma onto that person.

People often attribute charisma to the Buddha (as stated, for example, in the Rūpa Sutta, A 4.65), but the Buddha advises such people to move on into seeking wisdom within themselves. The significance of self-reliance and self-liberation is often and clearly declared by the Buddha, as this statement found in a number of different contexts, spoken to different audiences, in the Dīgha Nikāya and the Saṃyutta Nikāya, attest:

Therefore, Ānanda, dwel with yourself as an island, with yourself as refuge, with no other refuge—dwel with the Dharma as an island, with the Dharma as refuge, with no other refuge.<sup>106</sup>

(D 16.2.26/2:100 = 26.1/3:58, 26.27/77; S 22.43/3:42, 47.9/5:154, 47.13/5:163, 47.14/5:164)

## 7 Overcoming conceit

**7.1 THE ARAHATA SUTTA.** In the *Arahata Sutta* (S 1.25), in answer to a deva’s question on the nature of the arhat, the Buddha answers that they do not have any more conceit:

[Deva:]

63 *Yo hoti bhikkhu araham katāvī  
Khīṇāsavo antimadehadhārī,  
Mānaṃ nu kho so upagamma bhikkhu  
Ahaṃ vadāmītipi so vadeyya  
Mamaṃ vadantītipi so vadeyyāti.*

When a monk is an arhat, his duties done,  
With cankers destroyed, who wears his last body,  
Is it because this monk has come upon conceit  
That he would say, “I speak,”  
That he would say, “They speak to me”?

[The Blessed One:]

64 *Pahīṇamānassa na santi ganthā  
Vidhūpitā mānaganthassa sabbe,  
So vītivatto maññaṃ sumedho  
Ahaṃ vadāmītipi so vadeyya  
Mamaṃ vadantītipi so vadeyya  
Loke samaññaṃ kusalo viditvā  
Vohāramattena so vohareyyā’ti.*

There are no knots for one who has abandoned conceit,  
For him, all conceit’s knots are destroyed.  
The wise one has crossed over conceiving,  
He might still say, “I speak,”  
He might still say, “They speak to me.”  
Skillful in the world’s conventions, knowing,  
He uses them merely as expressions.

(S 63-64/1.25/1:14 f)

**7.2 THE YAVA, KĀLĀPA SUTTA.** It is interesting here that conceit is poetically called a “knot” (*gantha*), because conceit has a stranglehold on us, one that is difficult to undo. Indeed, such knots, like the proverbial Gordian knot, cannot be undone, but has to be cut right through. Only then we are really free from them. In the *Yava, kalāpa Sutta* (S 35.248), conceiving, perturbation, palpitation, proliferation and conceit (*māna*), are treated as synonyms, states that induce one to conjure up notions of self-identity and various misconceptions that only bring renewed suffering.<sup>107</sup>

**7.3 THE UPATIṢṢA SUTTA.** Sāriputta, the wisest of the monks after the Buddha, is renowned for his great faith in the Buddha,<sup>108</sup> but even he understands and accepts the fact that the Buddha himself is sub-

<sup>106</sup> *Tasmā-t-ih’Ānanda atta, dīpā viharatha atta, saraṇā anañña, saraṇā, dhamma, dīpā dhamma, saraṇā anañña, saraṇā.* On the tr of *dīpā* here as “island” or as “lamp” & discussion, see **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16) = SD 9 Intro (6a)

<sup>107</sup> S 35.248/4:201-203 = SD 40.3.

<sup>108</sup> See esp **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16.1.16-17/2:81-83 = SD 9) & **Sampasādanīya S** (D 28/3:99-116 = SD 14.14) = **Nalandā S** (S 47.12/5:159-161 = SD 12.18).

ject to impermanence. **The Upatissa Sutta** (S 21.2) opens with Sāriputta declaring that he is unmoved and unaffected by the effects of impermanence—“There is nothing in the world, on account of its change and alteration, would cause sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair to arise in me”—and Ānanda goes on to question him further:

4 When this was said, the venerable Ānanda said this to the venerable Sāriputta:

“Avuso Sāriputta, but what about the Teacher himself, wouldn’t change and alteration in him cause sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair to arise in you?”

5 “Avuso, even change and alteration in the Teacher himself would not cause sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair to arise in me.

However, this would occur to me:

‘Even the Teacher, so influential, so powerful, so mighty, has vanished!’<sup>109</sup> For if the Blessed One were to live for a long time, that would be for the good and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans.”<sup>110</sup> [275]

6 “It must be that I-making, mine-making, and the latent tendency of conceit have been fully uprooted in the venerable Sāriputta for a long time.”<sup>111</sup>

7 Therefore, even change and alteration in the Teacher himself would not cause sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair to arise in him.” (S 21/2:274 f) = SD 42.3

In other words, despite the greatness of the Buddha and despite Sāriputta’s admiration of the Buddha, Sāriputta does not regard the Buddha as a god, or a cult figure, but for what he is really: even such a great teacher will one day pass away!

**7.4 THE SAMIDDHI SUTTA.** In the **Samiddhi Sutta** (S 1.20), the Buddha declares:

[The Blessed One:]

48 “Equal,” or “superior,” or “inferior,”<sup>112</sup>

Those who think thus would then quarrel.

Being unshaken by<sup>113</sup> the three discriminations,<sup>114</sup>  
there is for him neither “equal” nor “superior.”

49 He has abandoned reckoning, he has not assumed conceit.

He has here cut off craving for name-and-form.

The devas and humans, searching here or beyond,

In the heavens, or in all the abodes,

Find not the one whose knots are cut,

The one free from trouble, free from desire.

(S 48-49/1.20/1:12 = Sn 842)<sup>115</sup> = SD 21.4

Such verses serve to remind us of the true purpose of Buddhism and religion in general. For most people, religion is what they want to believe, not what they should believe. Very few of us ever stop to

<sup>109</sup> This is only Sāriputta’s reflection: the Buddha has not yet passed away. In fact, Sāriputta predeceased the Buddha: see **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 16.1.16/2:82 f) = SD 9n.

<sup>110</sup> *Mahesakkho vata bho, satthā antarāhito mah’iddhiko mahā’nubhāvo, sace hi bhagavā ciraṃ dīgham-addhānam tiṭṭheyya, tad assa bahu.jana,hitāya bahu.jana,sukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya deva,manussānan ti.*

<sup>111</sup> Comy says that this alludes to Sāriputta’s arhathood as recorded in **Vedanā Pariggaha S = Dīgha,nakha S** (M 74.9-14/1:500,8-501,5) = SD 16.1.

<sup>112</sup> Or, “same, better, worse.”

<sup>113</sup> Lit “in” (the three modes) (as in Sn:N 1992) but unidiomatic and self-contradicting: if one is in any of the three “modes,” one is being discriminatory. Here rendered idiomatically.

<sup>114</sup> Listed at **Soṇa S 1** (S 22.49/3:48 f), (**Magga Vidhā S** (S 45.162/5:56), (**Bojjhaṅga Vidhā S** (S 46.41/5:98).

<sup>115</sup> Cf D 3:216; S 3:48 f, 80, 127, 5:56, 98; Tha 1076; Nm 195; Vbh 367.

examine what we believe and why we believe. It is good regularly to stop and examine ourselves *why we believe in what we believe*. The Buddha’s definitive teaching on how to overcome conceit is taught in **the Anusaya Sutta** (S 18.21). The significance of its teaching on overcoming conceit is attested by the fact that it is repeated in practically identical terms in five other Suttas: they are taught to Rāhula, and lead to the arhathood of Rādha and of Surādha.<sup>116</sup>

**7.5 OVERCOMING VIEWS.** An important way of overcoming conceit is to understand that *the teaching is above the teacher*: the True Dharma must take the highest priority and greatest precedence in our lives.<sup>117</sup> When we put a person (no matter how highly respected the person is) above the Dharma,<sup>118</sup> we are externalizing the Dharma. Instead of hero-worshipping, we should be seeking the Dharma within, which means that *we should watch and learn how our mind works, train it to be constantly calm and clear, so that in due course it will be free*.

If we wish to still and free our mind, we should not run after opinions and accumulate views. When we place the teacher above the teaching, we are measuring the views of one person against another. Even a right view in the mind of a spiritually immature person appears as wrong view: what more to say of wrong view! *What is in our mind appears more real than what is outside of it!*

Not measuring others means listening carefully to what they have to say, rightly or wrongly. Even the wisest teachers sometimes say the wrong things; even the most foolish teachers sometimes say the right things. This is the way of the unawakened.

As long as we are unawakened, no matter to whom we listen, we will react by constructing *our* own views of what we experience. The way out of this vicious cycle is to constantly reflect that whatever we hear are impermanent and conditioned. We should further ask, “What do I learn about myself from this?” Or, we can reflect thus: “This view about the body is not mine, I am not this view, this is not my self.” A more elaborate teaching is found in the Mānūsaya Sutta (S 18.21):

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## Mānūsaya Sutta

### The Discourse on Latent Tendency of Conceit

[How to overcome conceit]

(S 18.21/2:252)

At Sāvathī.

Then the venerable Rāhula approached the Blessed One, saluted him, and sat down at one side. Seated thus as one side, he said this to the Blessed One:

“Bhante, how should one know, how should one see, so that, concerning this body with its consciousness and all external signs, I-making, mine-making, and the latent tendency of conceit no longer occur?”<sup>119</sup>

(1) “Rāhula, whatever form—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near<sup>120</sup>—all forms should be seen as it is with right wisdom thus:

‘**This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.**’<sup>121</sup>

<sup>116</sup> There are 2 sets of identical suttas: (A) **Anusaya Sutta** (S 18.21/2:252) = **Rādha Sutta** (S 22.71/3:79 f, ends with Rādha’s arhathood) = (**Māna**) **Rāhula Sutta 1** (S 22.91/3:135 f); (B) **Mānāpagata Sutta** (S 18.22/2:253) = **Surādha Sutta** (S 22.72/3:80 f, ends with Surādha’s arhathood) = (**Māna**) **Rāhula Sutta 21** (S 22.92/3:136 f).

<sup>117</sup> See **The Teacher or the Teaching?** = SD 3.14.

<sup>118</sup> See **Kesa,puttiya S** (A 3.68/1:188-193) = SD 35.4a §3a(10) & Commentarial Note 3a(10).

<sup>119</sup> *Kathan nu kho bhante, jānato, katham passato imasmiñ ca sa,viññānake kāye bahiddhā ca sabba,nimittesu ahañ.kāra,mamañ.kāra,mānānusayā na hontī ti.*

<sup>120</sup> See **Khandha S** (S 22.48/3:47). This “totality formula” classification of the aggregates is explained in detail in the Vibhaṅga and briefly in the Visuddhimagga: “internal” (*ajjhata*) = physical sense-organs; “external” (*bahid-*



(2) “Rāhula, whatever feeling—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all feelings should be seen as it is with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(3) “Rāhula, whatever perception—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all perceptions should be seen as it is with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(4) “Rāhula, whatever formations—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all formations should be seen as it is with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

(5) “Rāhula, whatever consciousness—whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—all consciousnesses should be seen as it is with right wisdom thus:

‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’

Even so, Rāhula, when one knows thus, when one sees thus, concerning this body with its consciousness and all external signs, I-making, mine-making, and the latent tendency of conceit no longer occur.”<sup>122</sup>

[Even so, Rāhula, when one knows thus, when one sees thus, concerning this body with its consciousness and all external signs, I-making, mine-making and conceit are rid of—the discriminations of the mind are transcended so that it is at peace and well liberated.”]<sup>123</sup>

— evaṃ —

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*dhā*) = physical sense-objects; “gross” (*oḷārika*) = that which impinges (physical internal and external senses, with touch = earth, wind, fire); “subtle” (*sukhuma*) = that which does not impinge (mind, mind-objects, mind-consciousness, and water); “inferior” (*hīna*) = relating to undesirable or unattractive physical sense-objects; “superior [sublime]” (*paṇāna*), relating to desirable or attractive physical sense-objects; “far” (*dūre*) = subtle objects (“difficult to penetrate”); “near” (*santike*) = gross objects (“easy to penetrate”) [this last pair is by way of distance] (Vbh 1-13; Vism 14.73/450 f; Abhs 6.7). “Whether or not the details of the Vibhaṅga exposition are accepted as valid for the *nikāyas*, it seems clear that this formula is intended to indicate how each *khandha* is to be seen as a class of states, manifold in nature and displaying a considerable variety and also a certain hierarchy” (Gethin 1986:41). See Gethin 1986:40 f; Karunadasa 1967:38f; Boisvert 1995:43-48. As regards the terms “internal” (*ajjhata*) and “external” (*bahiddhā*), it should be noted that they have two applications: (1) the aggregates (*khandhā*) composing a particular “person” are “internal” to them and anything else is “external”; (2) the sense-organs are “internal” and their objects—which may include aspects of the person’s own body or mind, which are “internal” in the first sense—are “external.” Boisvert (1995: 43, 47), however overlooks these applications.

<sup>121</sup> As at **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda S** (M 62.3/1:421) = SD 3.11. **Mahā Hatthi, padopama S** (M 28.7) also gives a more concise statement as “There can be no considering that (element) as ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or ‘I am’” (M 28.7/1:185), which represents respectively the three kinds of mental proliferation (*papañca*) of self-view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), craving (*taṇhā*) and conceit (*māna*) (Nm 280; Vbh 393; Nett 37 f), or as “graspings” (*gāha*), namely, view (*diṭṭhi*), craving, conceit (MA 2:111, 225).

<sup>122</sup> This whole sutta is found mutatis mutandis at **Anusaya Sutta** (S 18.21/2:252) = **Rādha Sutta** (S 22.71/3:79 f, ends with Rādha’s arhathood) = (**Māna**) **Rāhula Sutta 1** (S 22.91/3:135 f).

<sup>123</sup> *Evaṃ kho Rāhula, jānato evaṃ passato imasmiṃ ca sa, viññāṇake kāye, bahiddhā ca sabba, nimittesu ahaṅkāra, mamaṅkāra, mānāpagataṃ mānasam hoti vidhā samatikkantaṃ santaṃ suvimuttan ti.* This sutta, with this parenthesized passage replacing the prec one, is found mutatis mutandis at **Mānāpagata Sutta** (S 18.22/2:253) = **Surādha Sutta** (S 22.72/3:80 f, ends with Surādha’s arhathood) = (**Māna**) **Rāhula Sutta 21** (S 22.92/3:136 f).

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